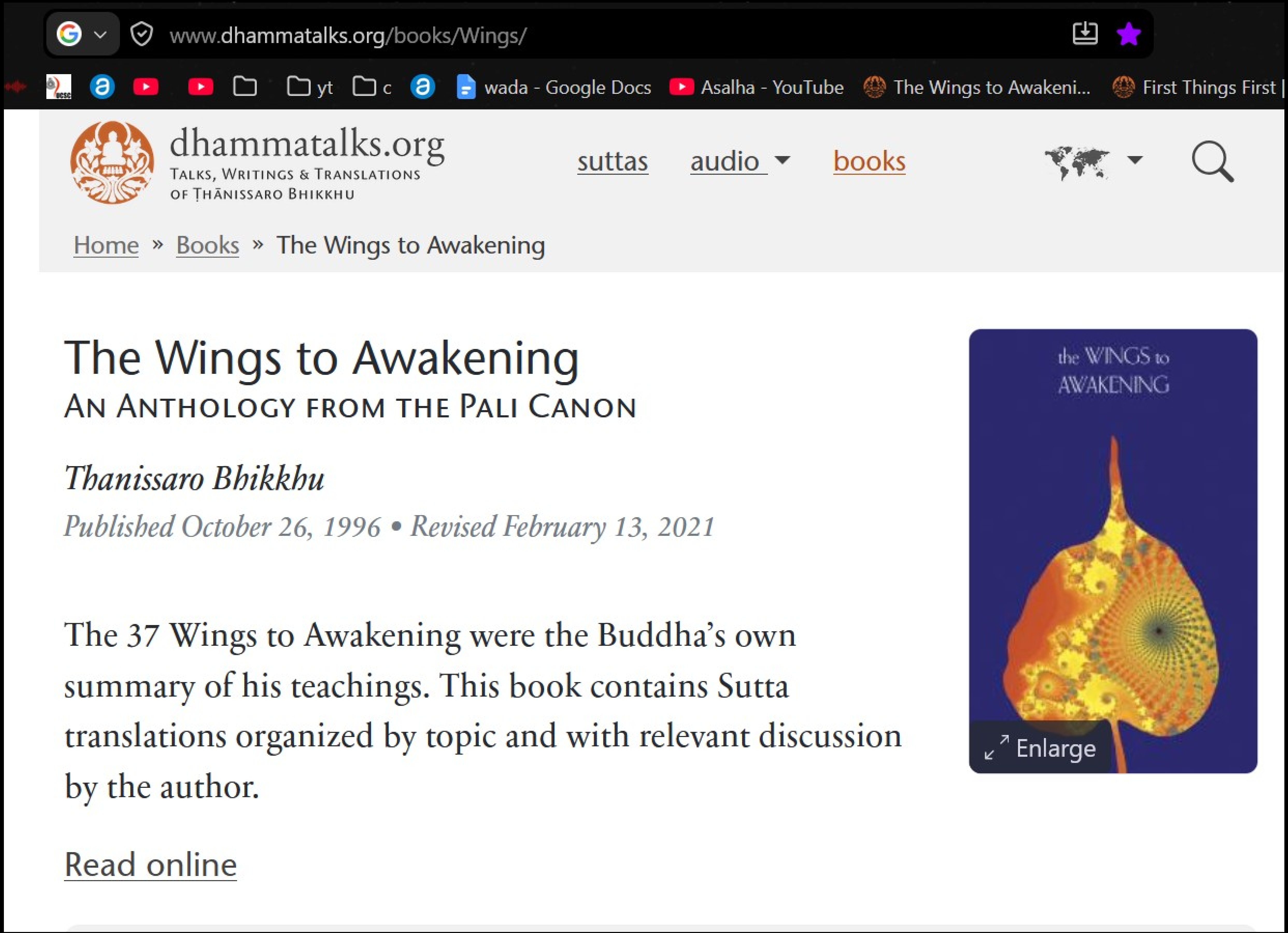
THE WINGS TO AWAKENING

Mastering the Dimensions of Time and the Present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The Wings to Awakening

AN ANTHOLOGY FROM THE PALI CANON

Thanissaro Bhikkhu

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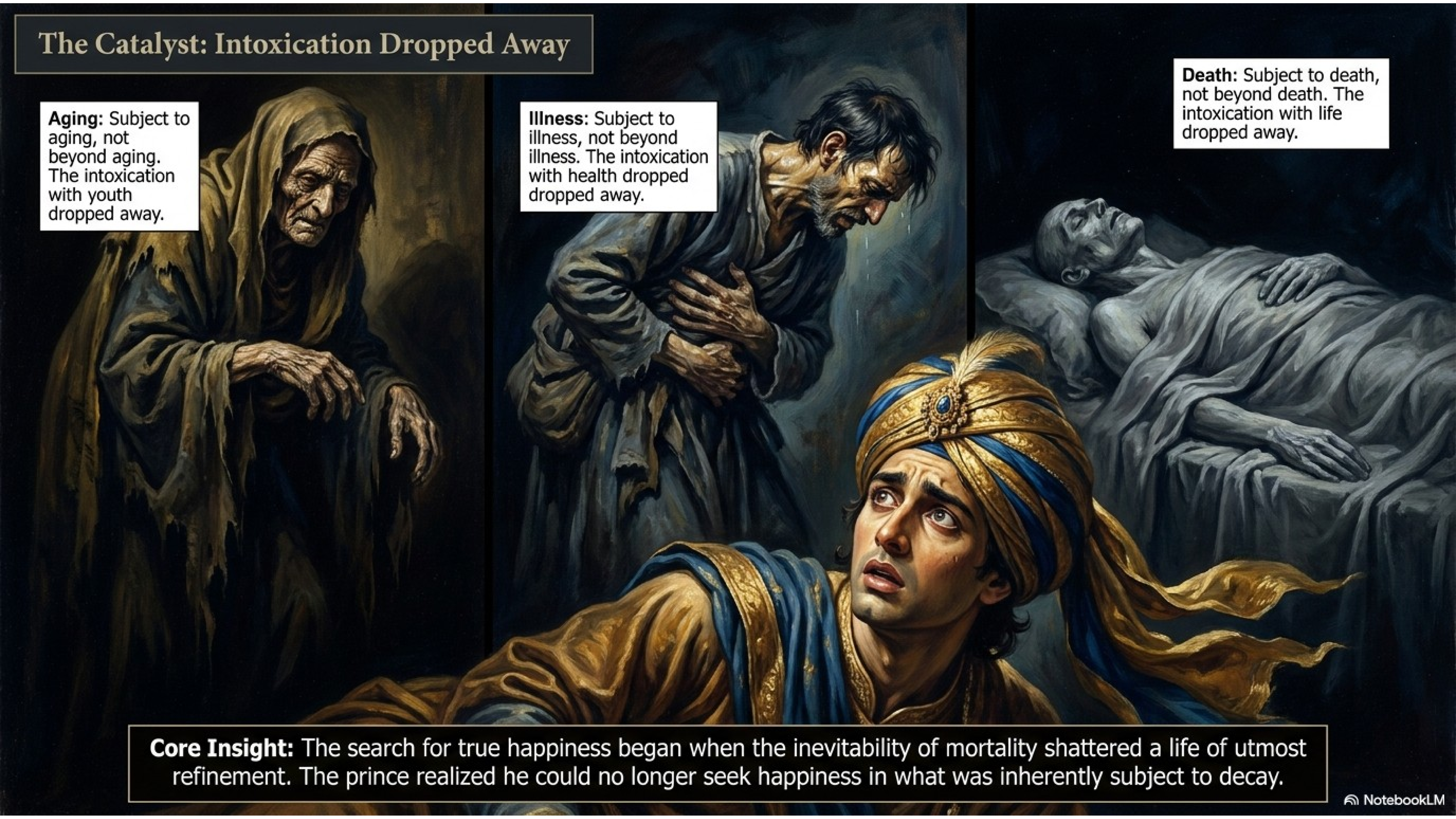
The 37 Wings to Awakening were the Buddha’s own summary of his teachings. This book contains Sutta translations organized by topic and with relevant discussion by the author.

Read online

The Catalyst: Intoxication Dropped Away



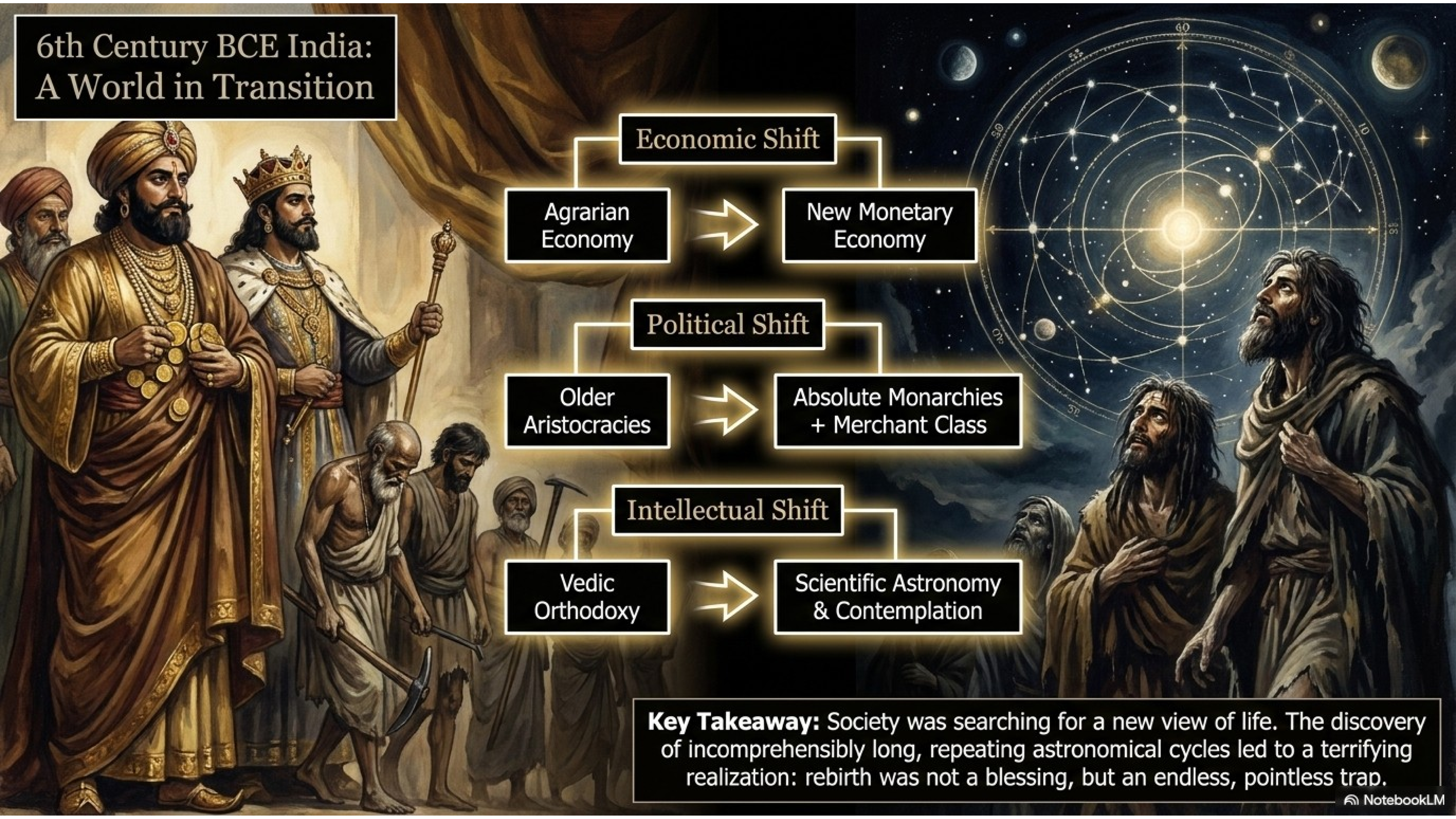
Aging: Subject to aging, not beyond aging. The intoxication with youth dropped away.

Illness: Subject to illness, not beyond illness. The intoxication with health dropped dropped away.

Death: Subject to death, not beyond death. The intoxication with life dropped away.

Core Insight: The search for true happiness began when the inevitability of mortality shattered a life of utmost refinement. The prince realized he could no longer seek happiness in what was inherently subject to decay.

6th Century BCE India: A World in Transition



Economic Shift

Agrarian Economy → New Monetary Economy

Political Shift

Older Aristocracies → Absolute Monarchies + Merchant Class

Intellectual Shift

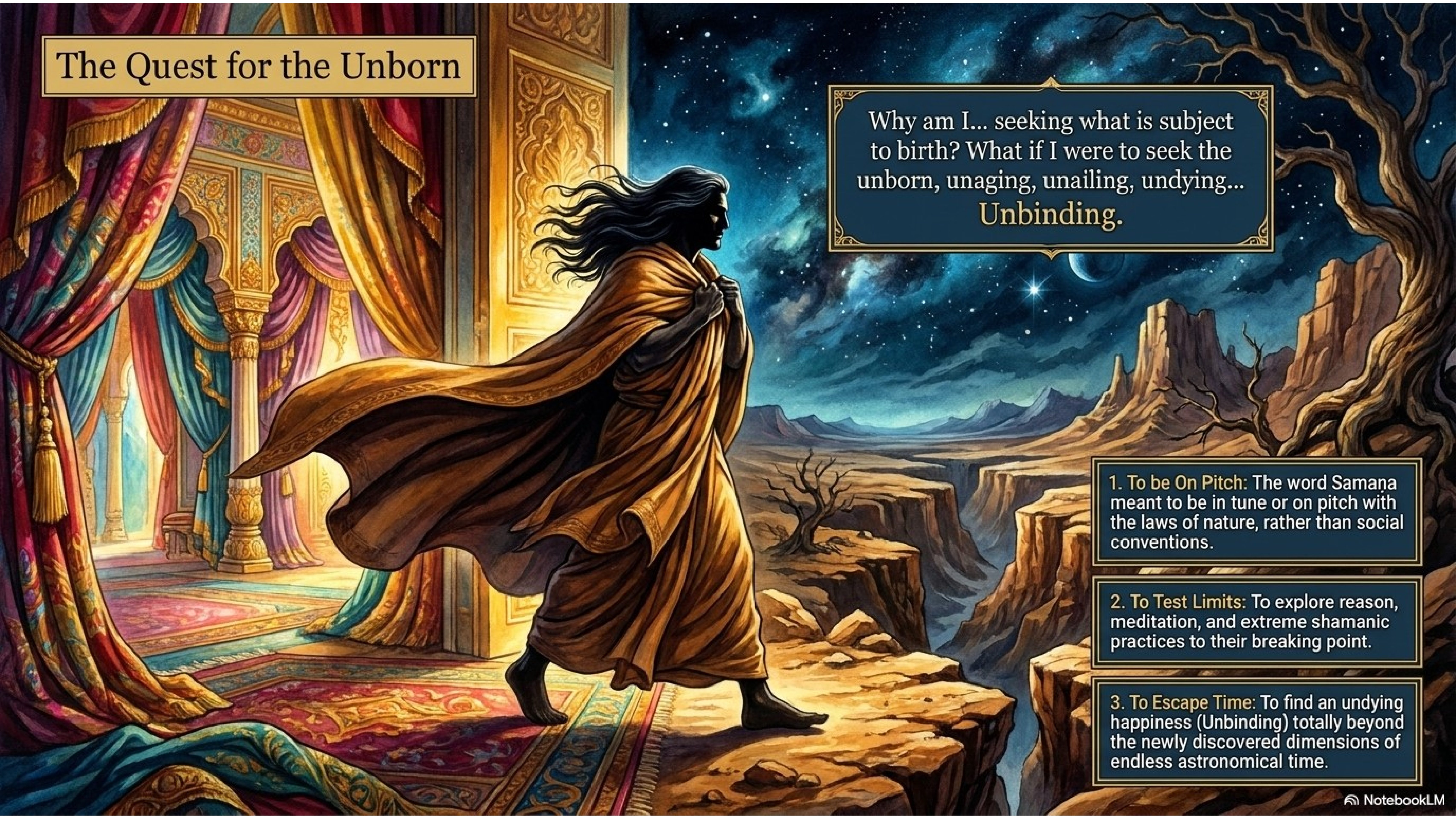
Vedic Orthodoxy → Scientific Astronomy & Contemplation

Key Takeaway: Society was searching for a new view of life. The discovery of incomprehensibly long, repeating astronomical cycles led to a terrifying realization: rebirth was not a blessing, but an endless, pointless trap.

The Competing Visions of Ultimate Happiness

School	Rebirth View	Causality View
Vedists	Rebirth is a reality	Causality relies primarily on ritual action.
Jains (Samaṇa)	Rebirth is restrictive	Linear, deterministic causality. Physical action binds the soul. Inaction is the only escape.
Lokāyatans (Materialists)	No survival beyond death	No causality. Events are random and self-caused. Pursue sensual pleasure now.
Ājīvakas (Astrologers)	Endless pointlessness	Causality is deterministic fate. Human action means nothing; wait for the cycle to unwind.

The Quest for the Unborn



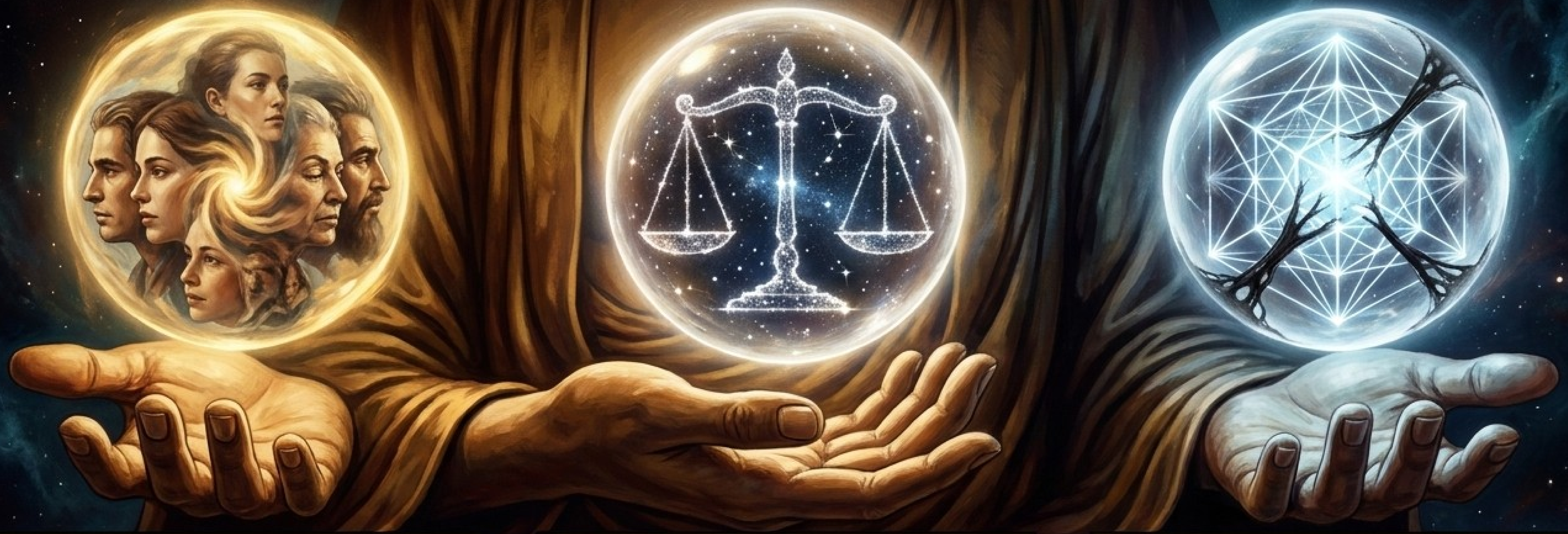
Why am I... seeking what is subject to birth? What if I were to seek the unborn, unaging, unailing, undying... **Unbinding.**

1. **To be On Pitch:** The word Samaṇa meant to be in tune or on pitch with the laws of nature, rather than social conventions.

2. **To Test Limits:** To explore reason, meditation, and extreme shamanic practices to their breaking point.

3. **To Escape Time:** To find an undying happiness (Unbinding) totally beyond the newly discovered dimensions of endless astronomical time.

The Three Insights of Awakening



Orb 1: The Illusion of Identity

Insight: Recollection of past lives.

Realization: Death is not annihilation, but there is no core, secure identity that survives unchanged.

Orb 2: The Moral Cosmos

Insight: Insight into the cosmic death and rebirth of beings.

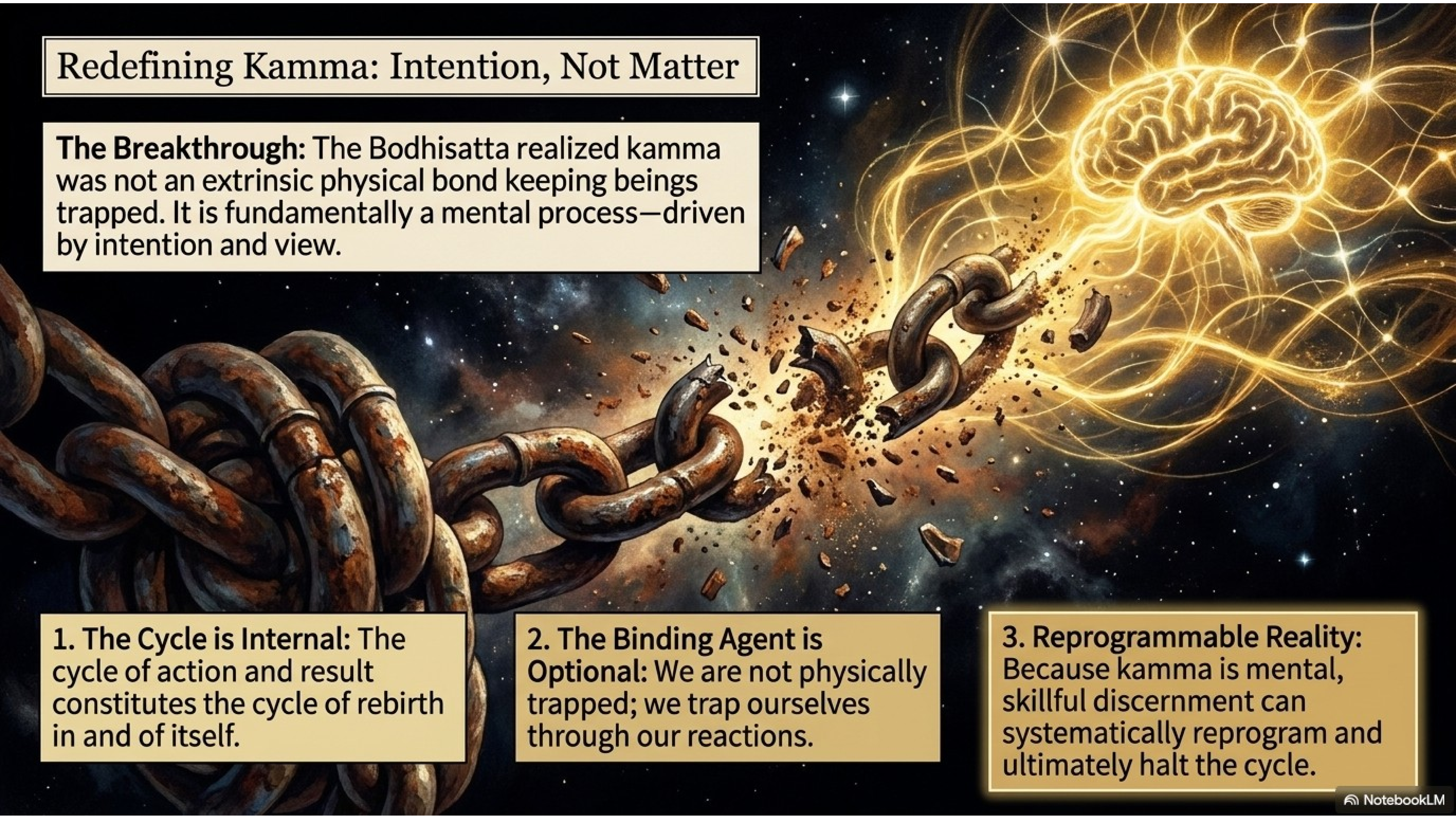
Realization: Moral principles—the intentions of the mind—are inherent to the physics of the cosmos, not just social conventions.

Orb 3: The Phenomenology of Mind

Insight: The ending of the mental effluents (*āsavas*).

Realization: Exclusive to the Buddha. A systematic way to break the cycle by mastering the mind in the present moment.

Redefining Kamma: Intention, Not Matter



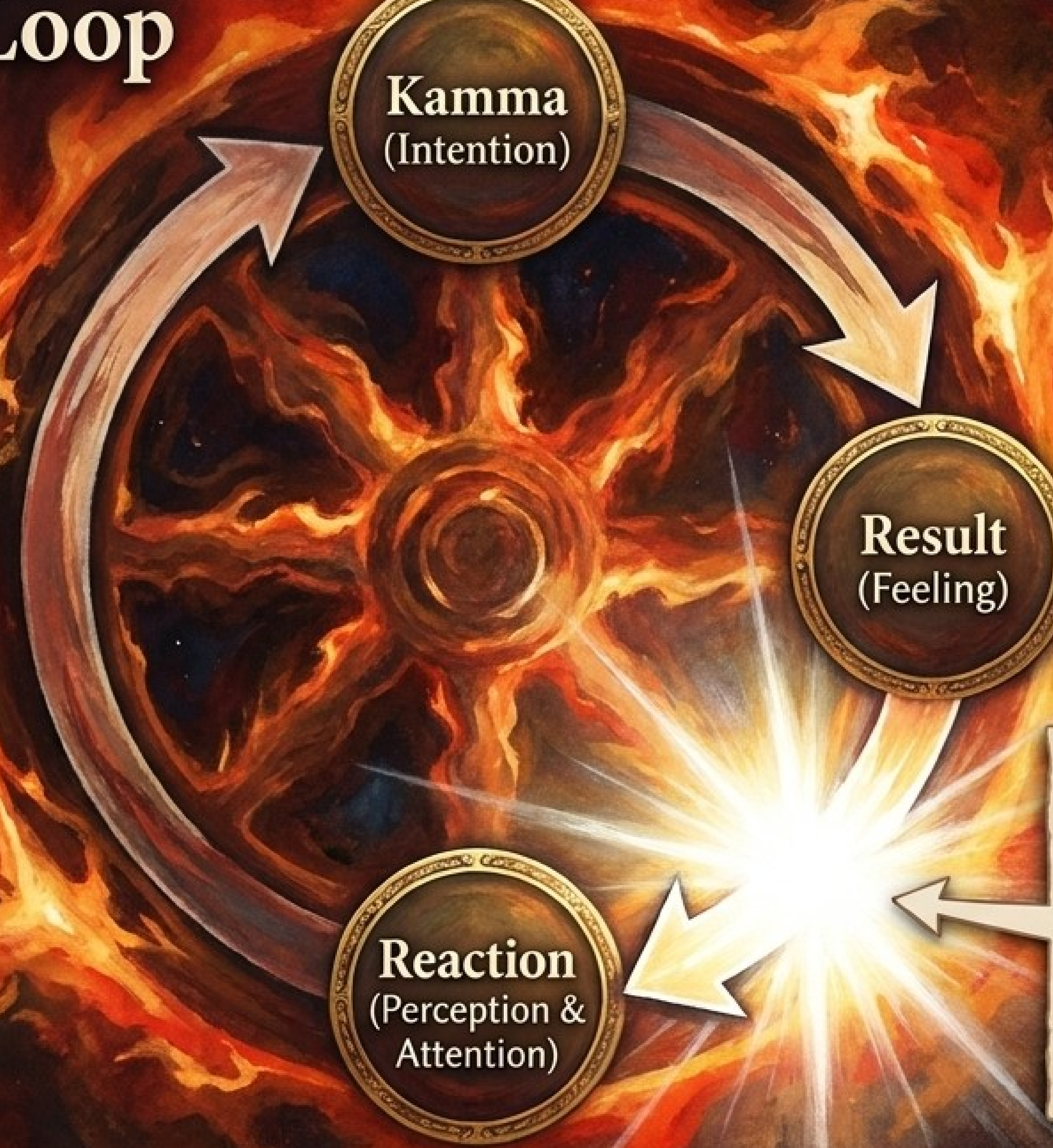
The Breakthrough: The Bodhisatta realized kamma was not an extrinsic physical bond keeping beings trapped. It is fundamentally a mental process—driven by intention and view.

1. The Cycle is Internal: The cycle of action and result constitutes the cycle of rebirth in and of itself.

2. The Binding Agent is Optional: We are not physically trapped; we trap ourselves through our reactions.

3. Reprogrammable Reality: Because kamma is mental, skillful discernment can systematically reprogram and ultimately halt the cycle.

The Feedback Loop of Experience



Kamma (Intention)

Result (Feeling)

Reaction (Perception & Attention)

The Trap: If perception and attention are clouded by ignorance and craving, they create Āsavas (effluents or fermentations)—the binding agents that color future intentions and keep the wheel spinning.

The Escape: The clouding factors do not necessarily have to follow feeling. Through concentrated discernment, the mind can observe the feeling without reacting, severing the link.

Idappaccayatā (This/That Conditionality)

The Synchronic
Present

(1) When this is,
that is.

The Linear Past

(2) From the arising of this
comes the arising of that.

Every event is driven by two inputs: the inescapable repercussions of past acts intersecting with the influence of present intentions. Existence is a non-linear web of past momentum and present free will.

The Linear Past

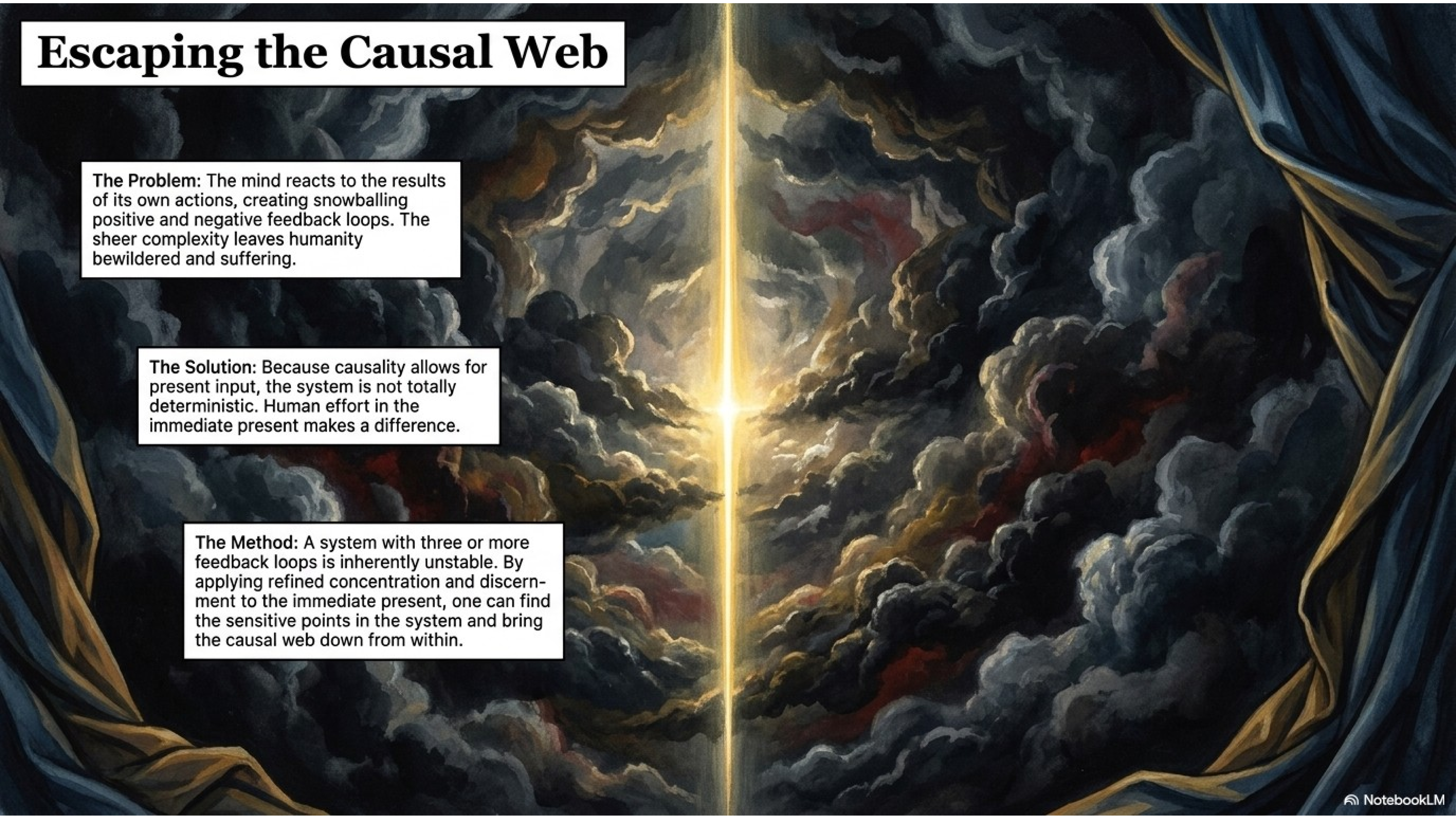
(4) From the stopping of this
comes the stopping of that.

The Synchronic Present

(1) When this is, that is.

(3) When this isn’t,
that isn’t.

Escaping the Causal Web



The Problem: The mind reacts to the results of its own actions, creating snowballing positive and negative feedback loops. The sheer complexity leaves humanity bewildered and suffering.

The Solution: Because causality allows for present input, the system is not totally deterministic. Human effort in the immediate present makes a difference.

The Method: A system with three or more feedback loops is inherently unstable. By applying refined concentration and discernment to the immediate present, one can find the sensitive points in the system and bring the causal web down from within.

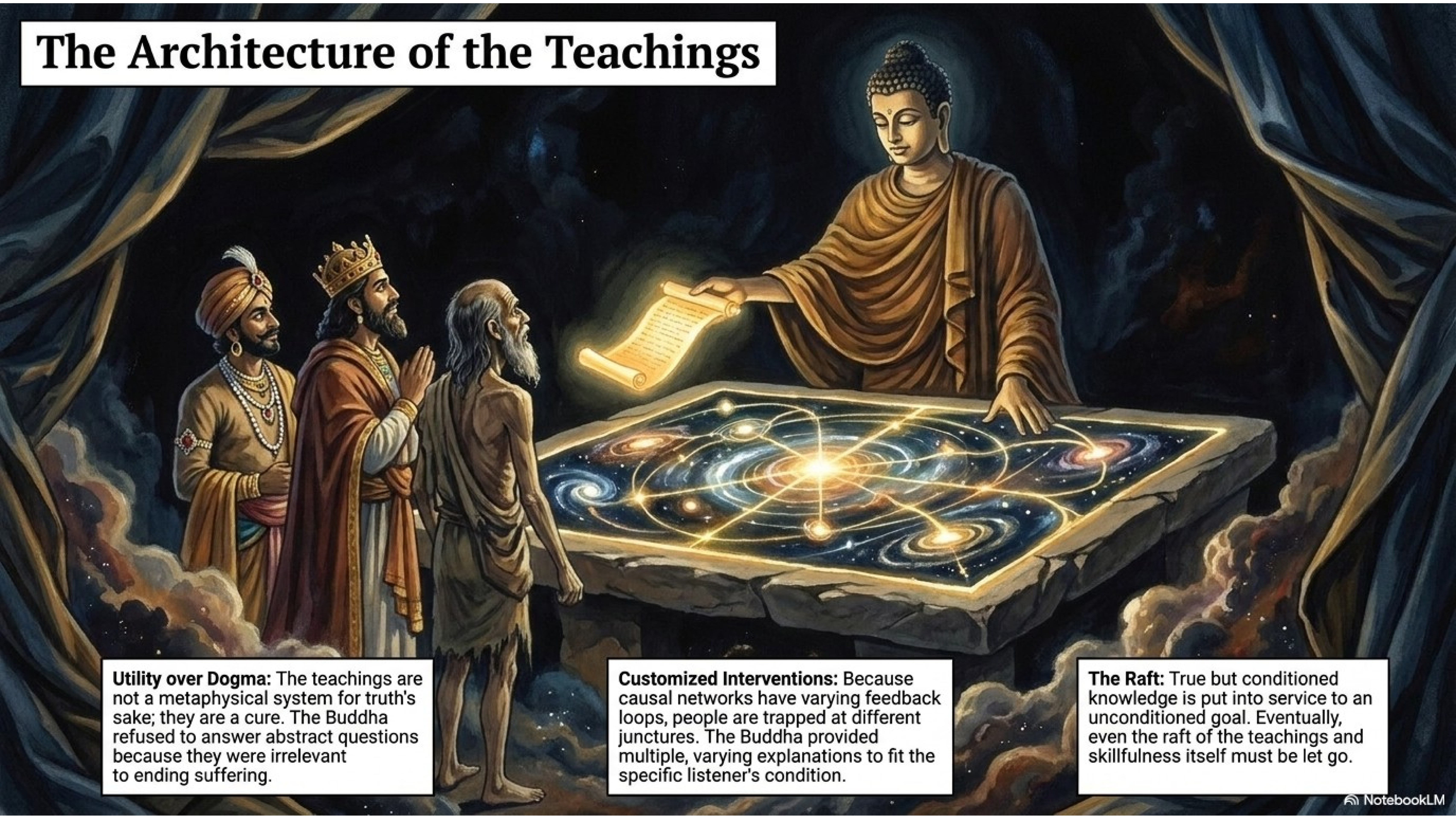
The Knowledge of Unbinding (Nibbāna)

Non-Fashioning: When all attachments to even the most subtle realizations are let go, the mind makes absolutely no present input into experience. The cycle of fabricated experience disbands.

The Physics of Fire: In ancient India, fire was viewed as clinging to its fuel in a state of agitation. When a fire went out, it was not extinguished into nothingness; it let go of its fuel, growing calm and free.

The Goal: Nibbāna is the extinguishment of the fire. The mind stops clinging, opening to the Unfabricated—an undying happiness beyond space and time.

The Architecture of the Teachings



Utility over Dogma: The teachings are not a metaphysical system for truth's sake; they are a cure. The Buddha refused to answer abstract questions because they were irrelevant to ending suffering.

Customized Interventions: Because causal networks have varying feedback loops, people are trapped at different junctures. The Buddha provided multiple, varying explanations to fit the specific listener's condition.

The Raft: True but conditioned knowledge is put into service to an unconditioned goal. Eventually, even the raft of the teachings and skillfulness itself must be let go.

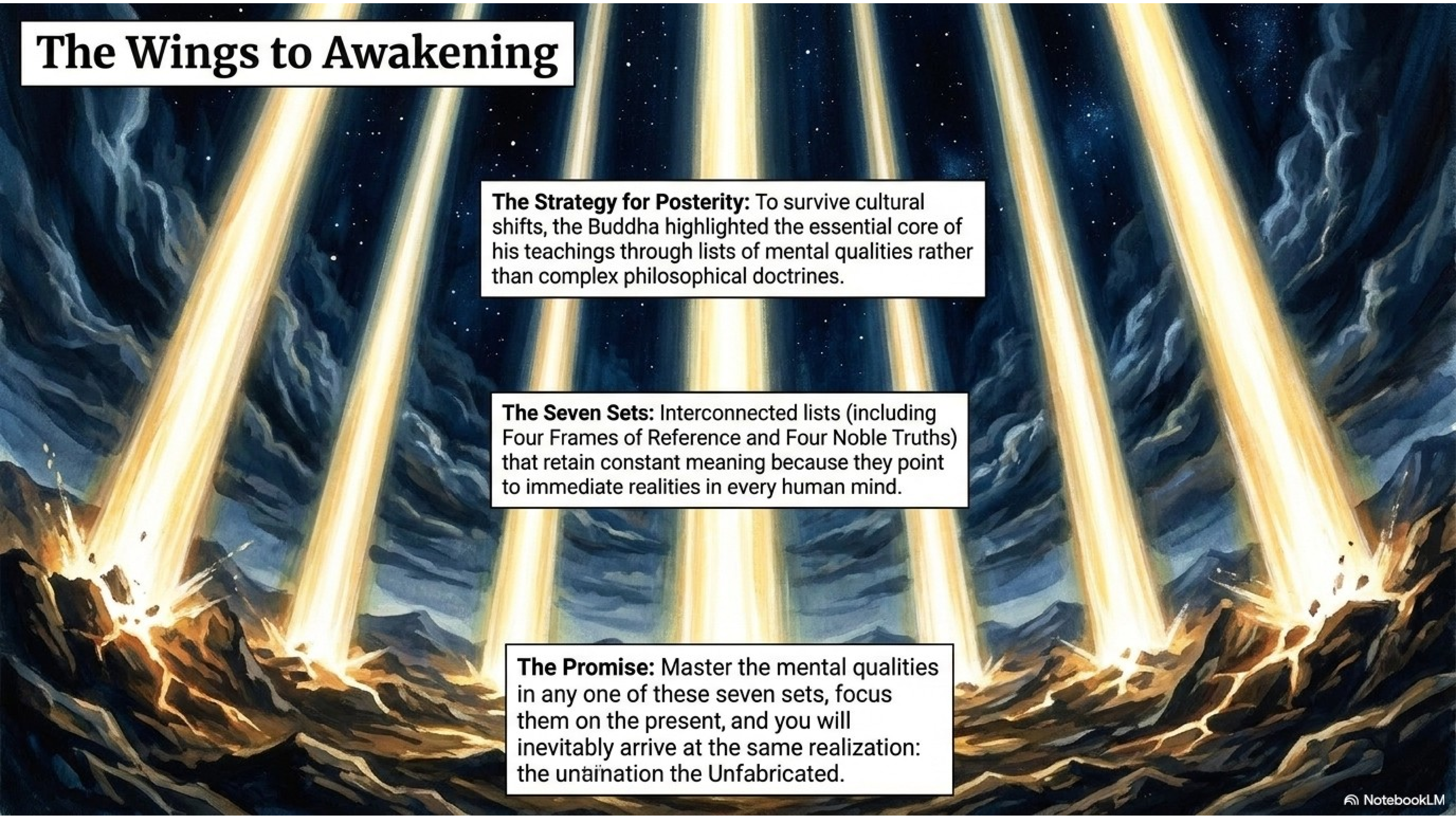
Going for Refuge: The Prerequisite of Trust

The Challenge: No one can master direct experience for anyone else. Furthermore, Unbinding is something the listener has never experienced. It cannot be proven prior to Awakening.

The Solution: The Buddha used character, psychic feats, and primarily reason (analogies and similes) to instill faith. Reason shows the teachings make sense based on what the listener already knows.

The Refuge: Placing trust in the truth of the Buddha's Awakening, and gaining conviction in the principle of kamma. It is the confidence that one has the ability to follow the path of skillful action.

The Wings to Awakening



The Strategy for Posterity: To survive cultural shifts, the Buddha highlighted the essential core of his teachings through lists of mental qualities rather than complex philosophical doctrines.

The Seven Sets: Interconnected lists (including Four Frames of Reference and Four Noble Truths) that retain constant meaning because they point to immediate realities in every human mind.

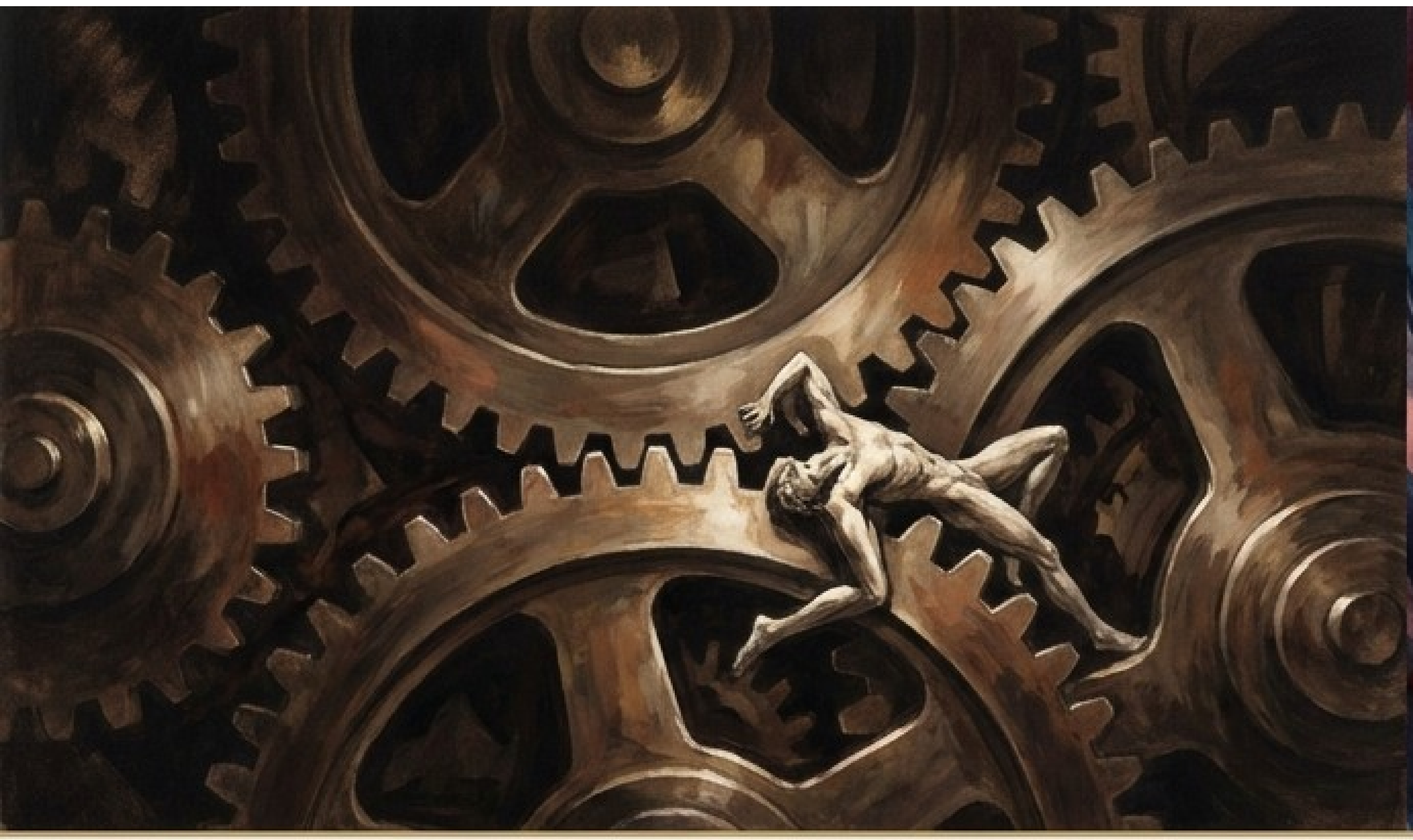
The Promise: Master the mental qualities in any one of these seven sets, focus them on the present, and you will inevitably arrive at the same realization: the unaïnation the Unfabricated.

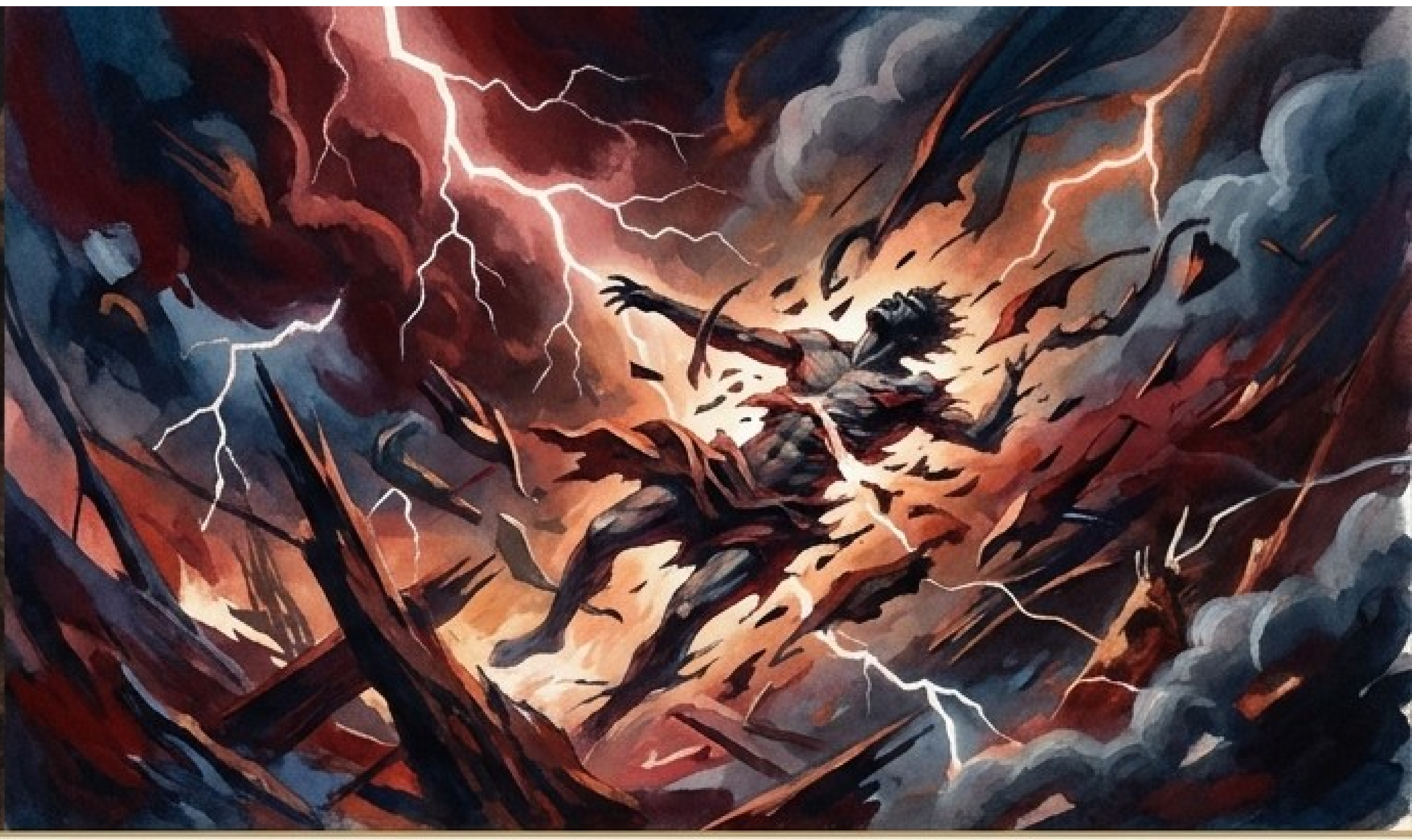
The Gift to Posterity

1. **Total Unbinding:** When the kammic residue of his previous life was exhausted, the Buddha passed into total Unbinding.
2. **The Final Lesson:** True happiness needs no external justification. The limitless freedom of Unbinding is a worthy end for its own sake, unbound by society's demand to justify actions through continued worldly functioning.
3. **The Open Invitation:** The Dhamma-Vinaya remains as an open invitation to anyone, anywhere, to test if the causal principles of time can be mastered, leading to freedom totally beyond measure.

THE MASTERY OF SKILL

The Mythic Art of Action, Intention, and Awakening





Theories of Order (Determinism)

The universe is a vast machine based on astronomy. Linear causes and fixed rules dictate everything. Human action is an illusion or completely bound to impersonal, pre-ordained cycles.

Theories of Non-Being (Absolute Chaos)

The physical universe is primary, but no causal laws operate. Everything is spontaneous, random, and chaotic. Purposeful action is entirely pointless.

The Cosmic Trap: Both extremes force the same conclusion—purposeful human action is ultimately meaningless.

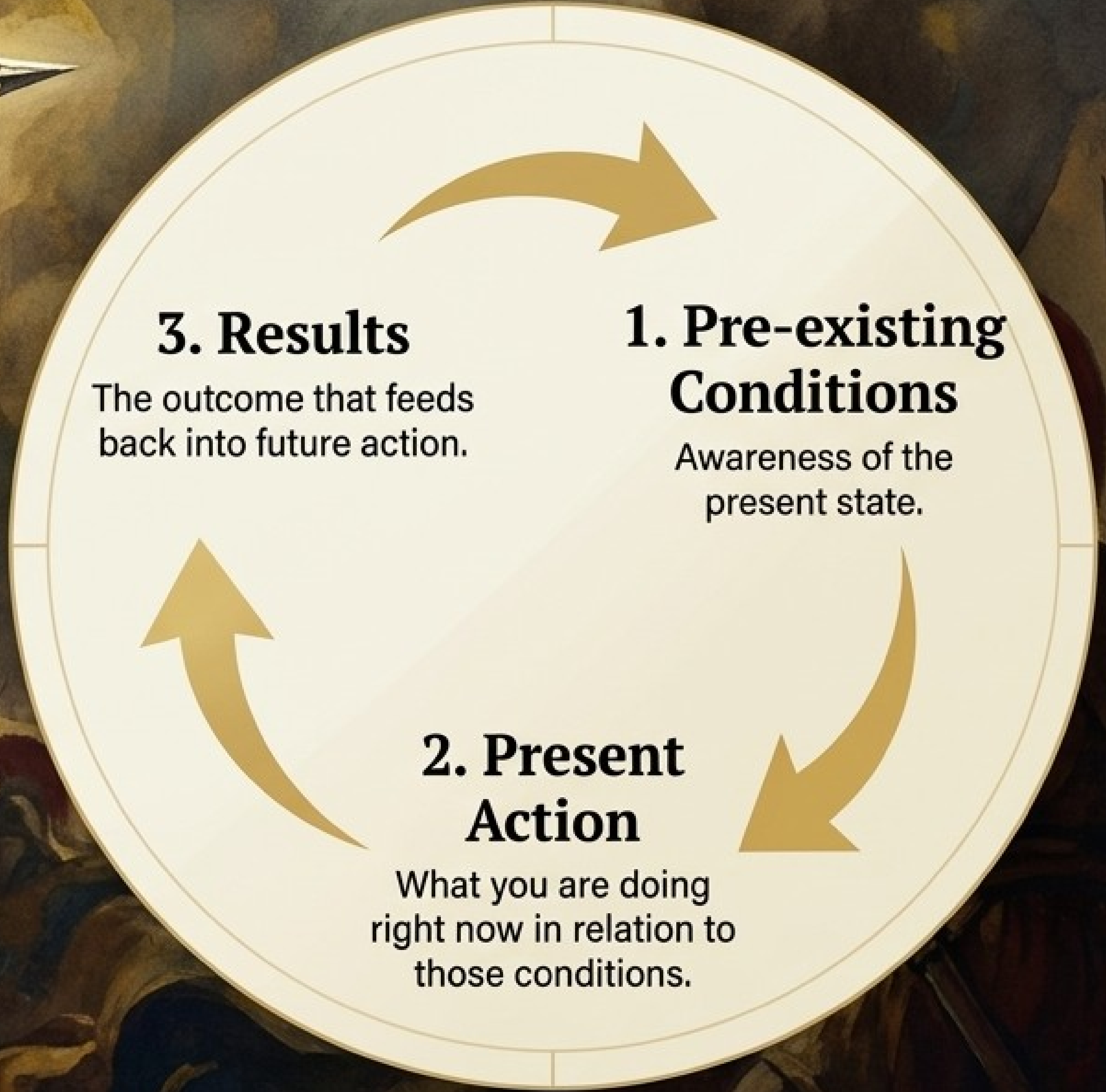
The Paradigm of Skillfulness

	Determinism	Chaos	The Buddha
Primary Focus	Abstract physical principles.	Total randomness.	The level of immediate experience.
Nature of Action	Pre-ordained and fixed.	Spontaneous and pointless.	Learnable, purposeful, and effective.

Core Insight: Instead of debating theories of the universe, the Buddha explored the implications of a single, undeniable truth: **It is possible to master a skill.**

The Anatomy of a Skill

This threefold focus allows a practitioner to adjust and refine. Acts of perception, attention, and intention provide new input into the cosmic cycle, proving that action is not entirely deterministic. It is a system of **deterministic chaos** driven by feedback loops.



1. Pre-existing Conditions

Awareness of the present state.

2. Present Action

What you are doing right now in relation to those conditions.

3. Results

The outcome that feeds back into future action.

The Roots of Affliction (Unskillful)

- Greed
- Aversion
- Delusion

The Roots of Welfare (Skillful)

- Lack of Greed
- Lack of Aversion
- Right Views

Key Principle: The essence of an action lies in its motivating intention. Even ‘good’ intentions can become unskillful if they are clouded by delusion or ignorance of the present situation.

16:9 Slide Layout

Phase 1: Anticipate (Before Acting)

Will this lead to self-affliction or harm to others?

If yes → **STOP**

Phase 2: Monitor (While Acting)

Is this currently causing harm?

If yes → **ABANDON**

Phase 3: Review (After Acting)

Did it cause harm?

If yes → **CONFESS & RESTRAIN**
If no → **REJOICE & CONTINUE TRAINING**

Bodily, verbal, and mental actions must be purified through repeated reflection—using the mind as a mirror.

Step 1: The Base (*Thana*)

Establishing the tonic note. Making the mind even and on-pitch (sama).

Step 2: Attuning

Penetrating and fine-tuning the remaining faculties in relation to the tonic.

Step 3: The Theme (*Nimitta*)

Locking onto the essential message or governing principle of the piece.

Takeaway: To develop the path is to become a virtuoso of sensitivity. Meditation requires listening to the quality of one’s own listening.

The Three Tenets of Meditative Artistry

Flexibility

Knowing multiple tuning systems to handle any contingency. The Buddha taught 7 sets of the Wings to Awakening as workable systems for tuning the mind.

Balance

Avoiding the extremes of being too sharp (excessive energy) or too flat (excessive stillness).

“Right view” means “just right.”

Effortless Mastery

Reaching a point where immense, grueling underlying effort gives way to the appearance of total, natural ease.

The Meta-Skill Framework

The Bodhisatta developed the factors of action to their absolute highest degree.

Most Skillful Attention

Viewing all experience exclusively through the Four Noble Truths (Stress, Origination, Cessation, Path).

Most Skillful Intention

Directed thought leading to complete mental absorption (Right Resolve).

Most Refined Feeling

Cultivating the pleasure and equanimity found in the highest states of absorption.

The Paradox of the Raft

The Misunderstanding

Relinquish attachment to the path of practice as quickly as possible.

The Reality

To abandon the raft in mid-flood is to drown.

The Paradox

The meditator must intentionally use the very qualities they wish to escape, mastering them until they are naturally stilled.

The path is abandoned only upon safely reaching the roof, only upon consummation.

Equipoise & Non-Fashioning (*Atammayata*)

The Point of Resonance

In chaos theory, there is a point of resonance where the equations defining a system divide by zero. Anything entering this point becomes undefined, and thus released.

Gravitational Escape

Just as gravity is required to bring the moon to a point where it escapes gravity, the path of skillful action is required to bring the mind to the point where the cycle of action ends.

The Result

The cosmos conditioned by time ends, leaving the limitless freedom of consciousness without surface.

Watch 1 (Past Lives)

Watch 2 (The Divine Eye)

Watch 3 (The Ending of Effluents)

Watch 1
(Past Lives)

Recollection of manifold past existences.

Ignorance destroyed.

Watch 2
(The Divine Eye)

Seeing beings rise and fall strictly according to their Kamma (actions/intentions).

Knowledge arose.

Watch 3
(The Ending of Effluents)

The realization of the Four Noble Truths. Birth is ended, the holy life fulfilled, the task done.

Light arose.

The Charter of Free Inquiry

Do Not Go By:

Reports, legends, traditions, scriptures, logical conjecture, or the thought “this is our teacher.”

Go By Direct Knowledge:

When you know for yourselves that these qualities are unskillful and lead to harm—abandon them.

The External Check:

Cross-reference your direct experience with the observation of admirable people (the wise) who live by the principle of kamma. Friendship with admirable people is the whole of the practice.

The Meta-Skill

The Buddha's path is not a collection of abstract facts. It is the full art and science of skillfulness.

① Focus on the mind as the source.

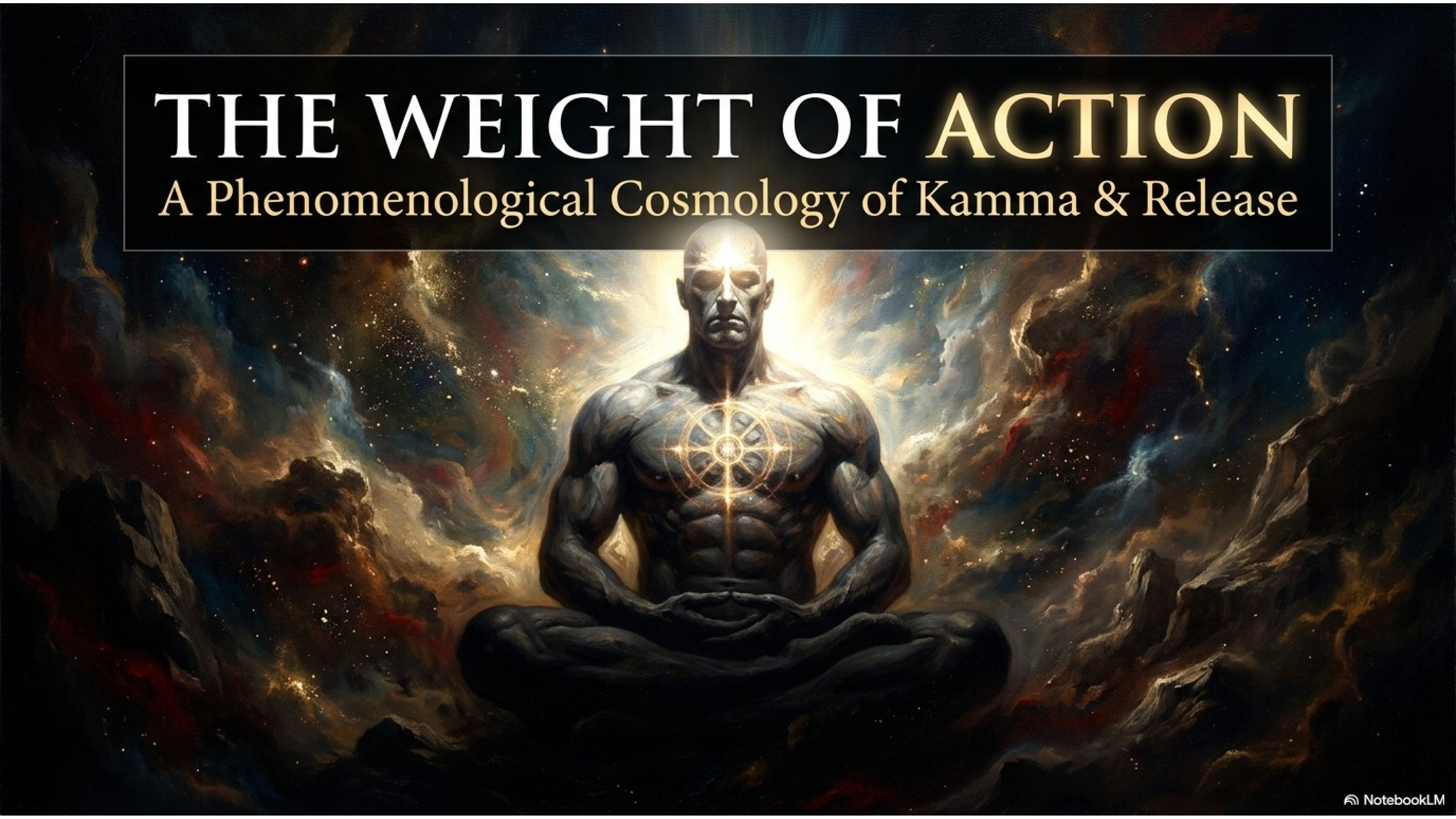
② Learn to deal skillfully with the unskillful.

③ Master the skillful to perfection.

④ Transcend the skill entirely, seeing what lies both in skillfulness and beyond.

THE WEIGHT OF ACTION

A Phenomenological Cosmology of Kamma & Release



The Primary Factor of the Cosmos

Skillful action is not just one of many variables contributing to happiness. It is the definitive force shaping reality.

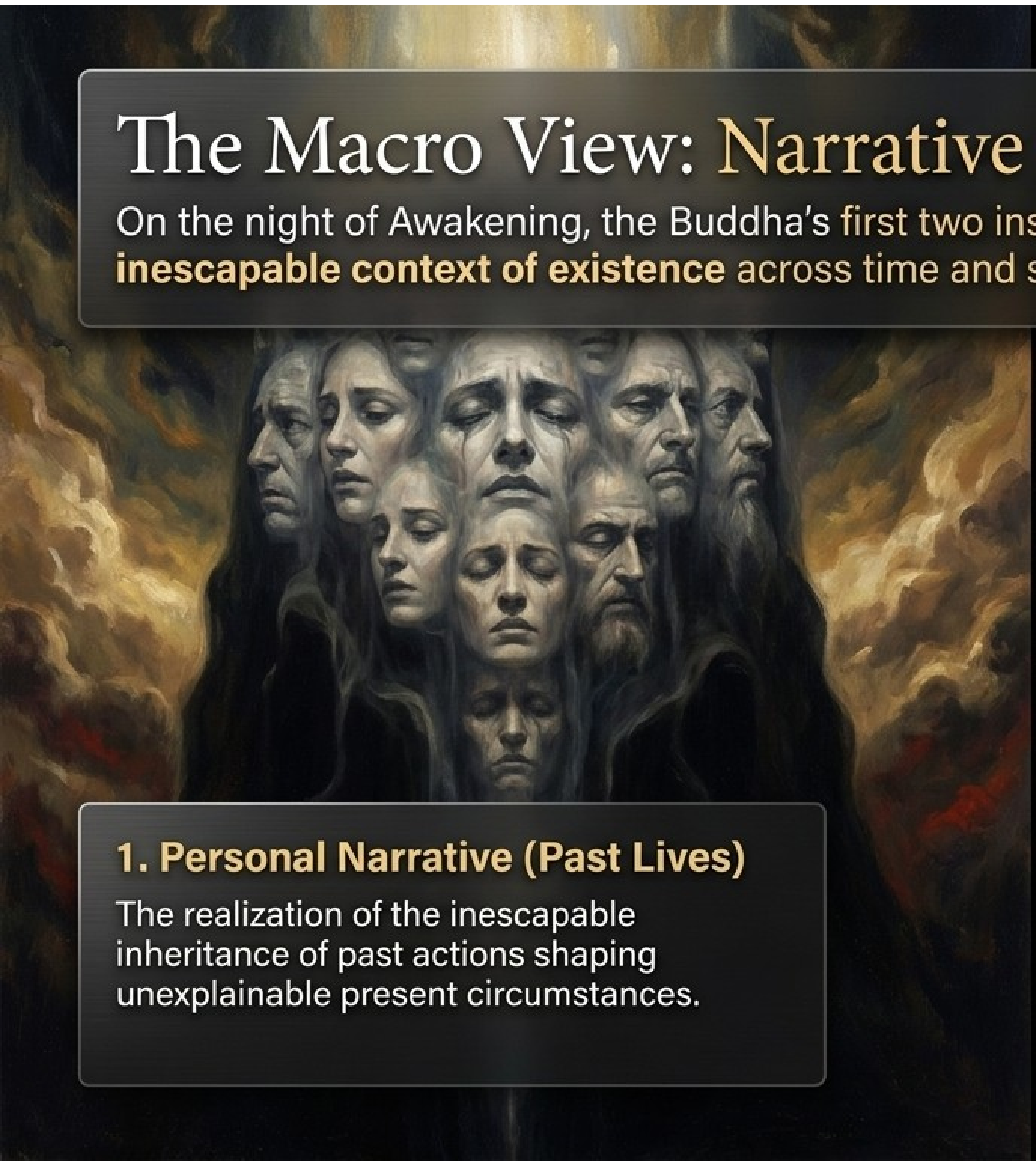
Beings are owners of kamma, heir to kamma, born of kamma, related through kamma, and have kamma as their arbitrator.

THE PARADOX OF THE PATH

Reaching ultimate Awakening requires absolute faith in kamma as a working hypothesis, yet that faith is only truly verified after the first glimpse of Awakening.

The Macro View: Narrative & Cosmology

On the night of Awakening, the Buddha's first two insights established the vast, **inescapable context of existence** across time and space.



1. Personal Narrative (Past Lives)

The realization of the inescapable inheritance of past actions shaping unexplainable present circumstances.

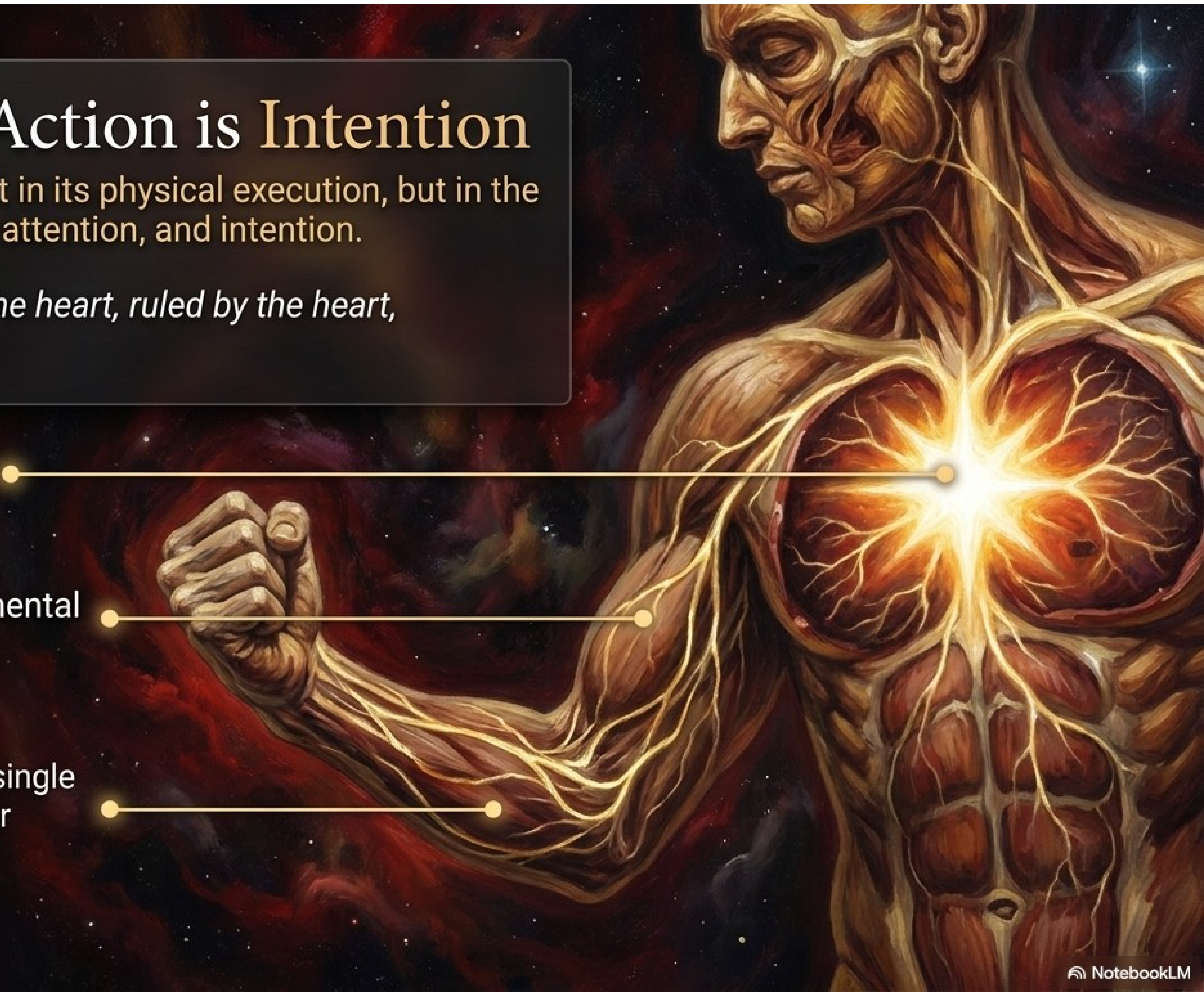
2. Cosmic Principles (Death & Rebirth)

Moral standards are not mere social conventions; they are intrinsic, objective laws governing the workings of the entire cosmos.

The Essence of Action is Intention

The **skillfulness** of an act is not in its physical execution, but in the mental qualities of perception, attention, and intention.

“Phenomena are preceded by the heart, ruled by the heart, made of the heart.”



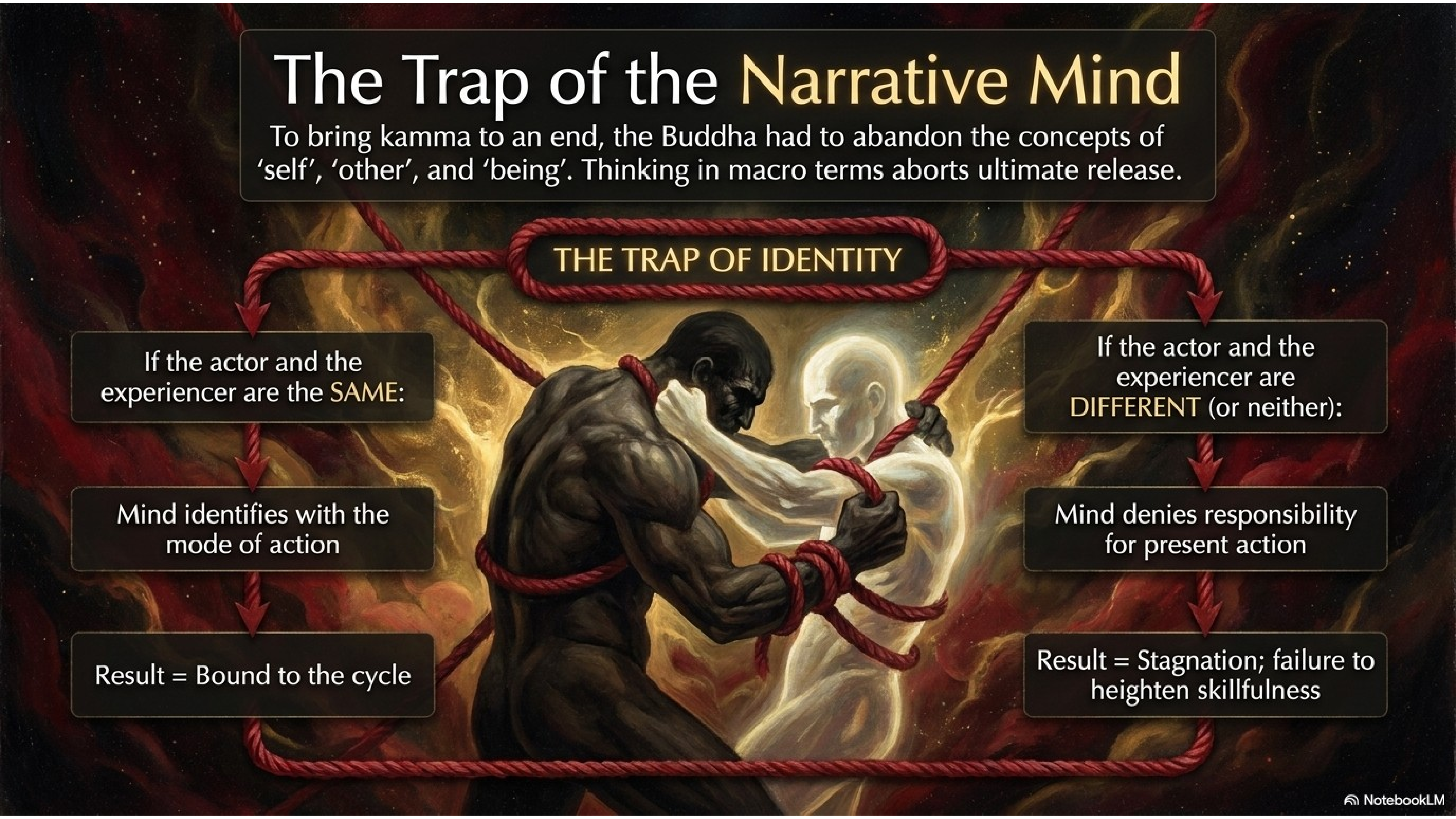
Intention: The decision to act (the true essence of *kamma*).

Perception & Attention: The mental qualities that inform the act.

Mind & Matter: Two sides of a single coin, with the mental side of prior importance.

The Trap of the Narrative Mind

To bring kamma to an end, the Buddha had to abandon the concepts of 'self', 'other', and 'being'. Thinking in macro terms aborts ultimate release.



THE TRAP OF IDENTITY

If the actor and the experiencer are the SAME:

Mind identifies with the mode of action

Result = Bound to the cycle

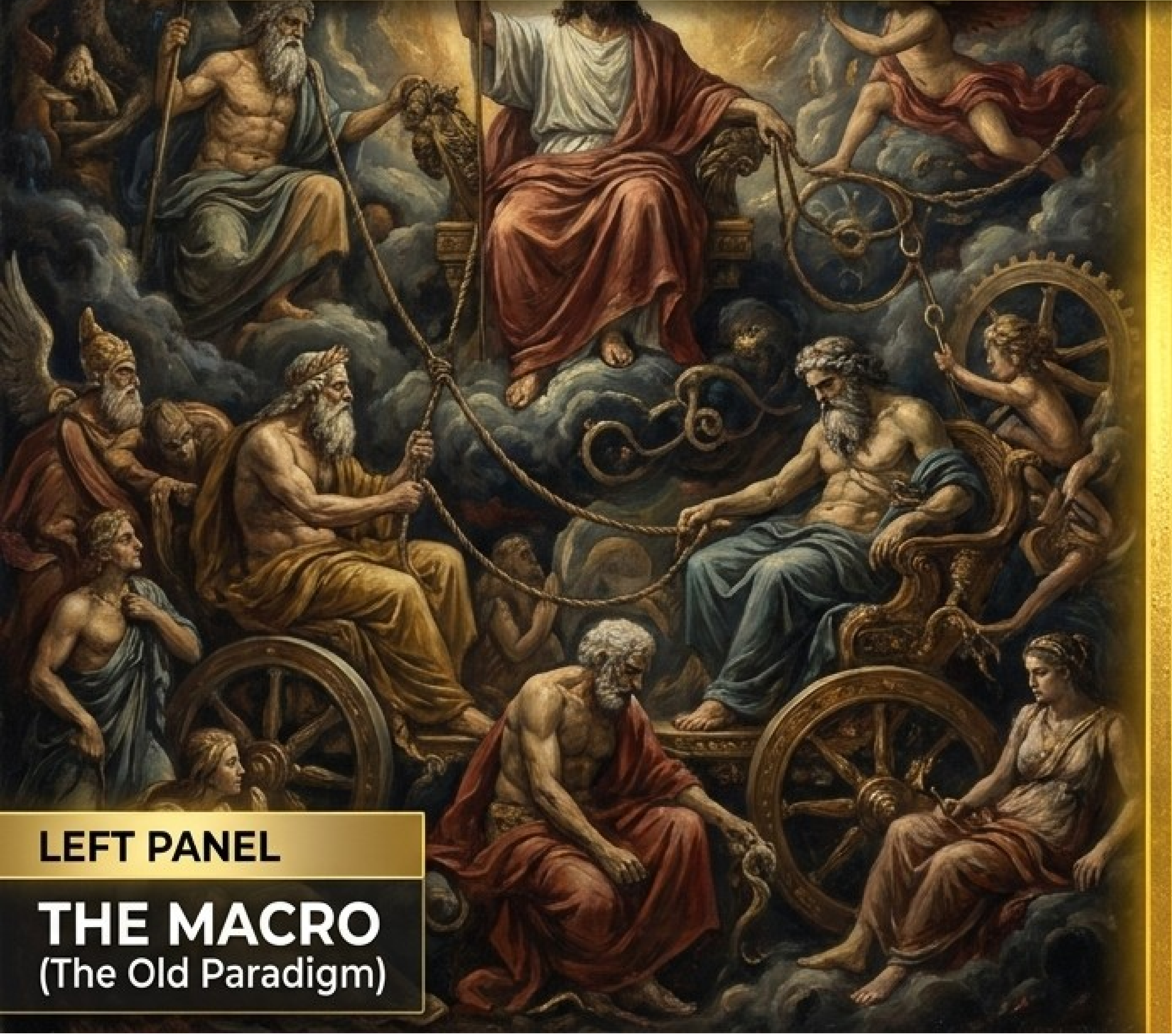
If the actor and the experiencer are DIFFERENT (or neither):

Mind denies responsibility for present action

Result = Stagnation; failure to heighten skillfulness

The Radical Shift: Entry into Emptiness

To avoid the traps of cosmology and narrative, the Buddha adopted a radical phenomenological mode—zooming into the immediate events of present consciousness without asking ‘who’ or ‘what’ is experiencing them.



LEFT PANEL

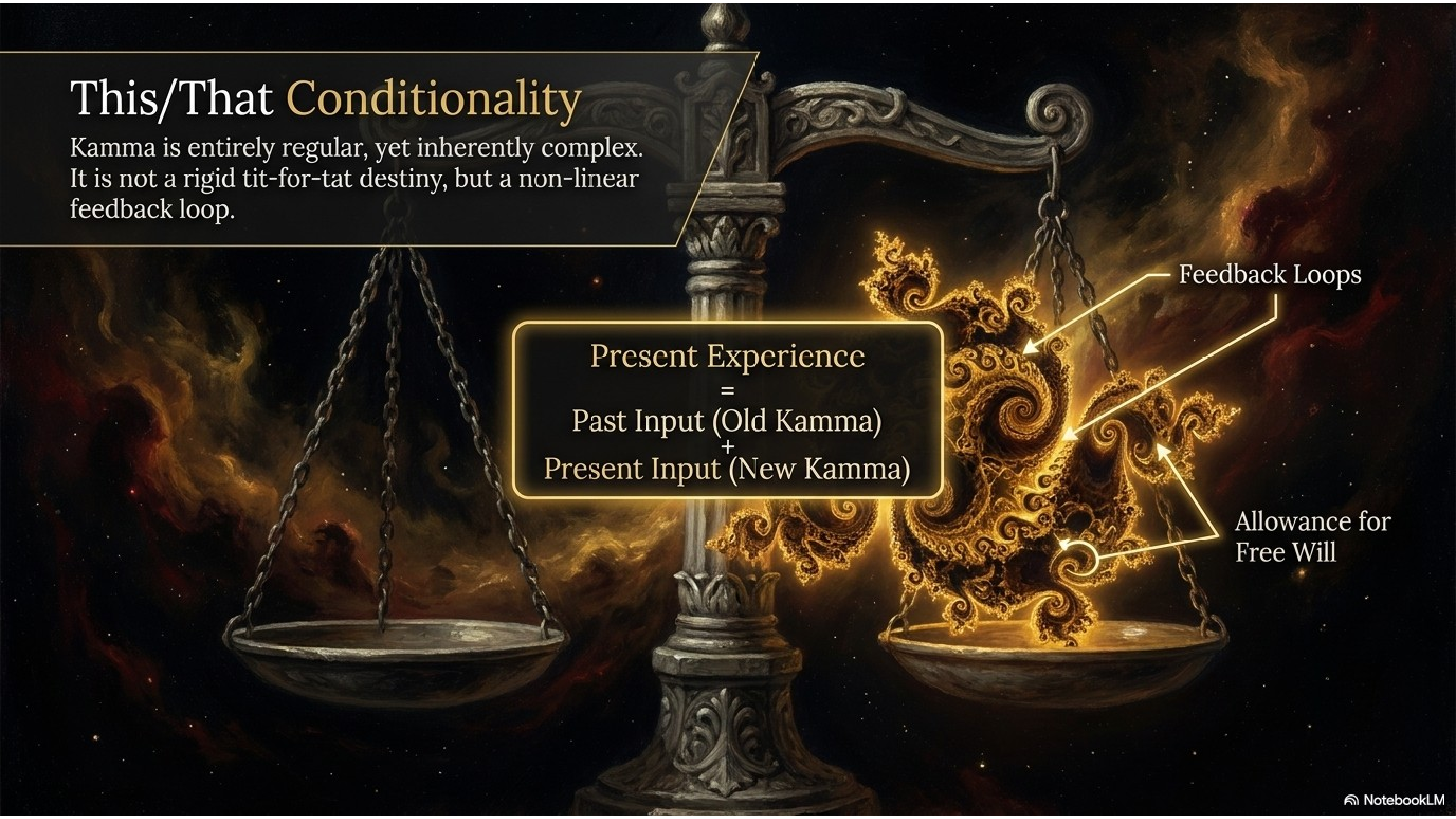
THE MACRO
(The Old Paradigm)

RIGHT PANEL

THE MICRO
(Phenomenology)

This/That Conditionality

Kamma is entirely regular, yet inherently complex. It is not a rigid tit-for-tat destiny, but a non-linear feedback loop.



Present Experience

=

Past Input (Old Kamma)

+

Present Input (New Kamma)

Feedback Loops
Allowance for Free Will
NotebookLM

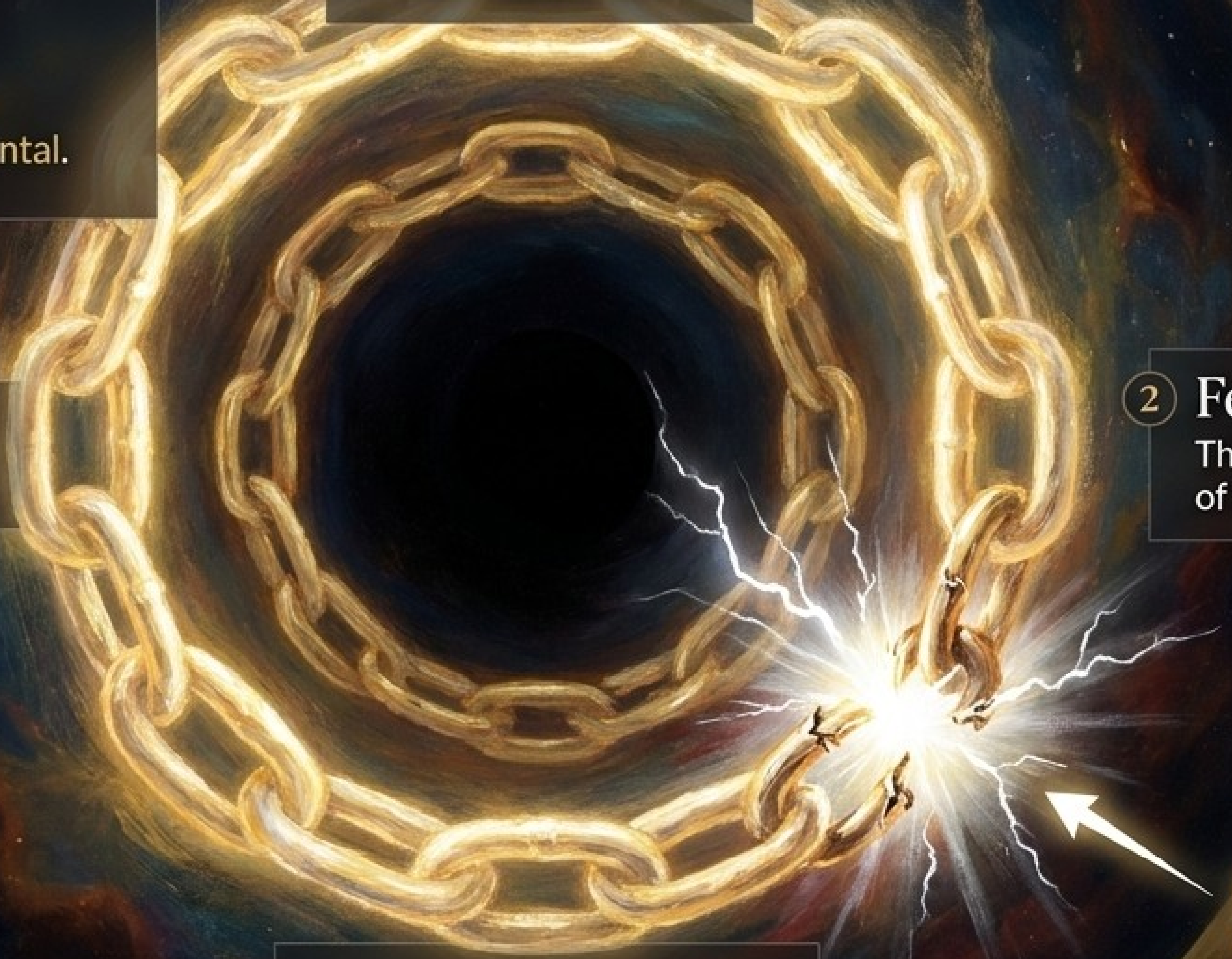
The Law of Scale Invariance

All non-linear processes exhibit scale invariance:
the pattern of the macro is perfectly mirrored in the micro.

CORE INSIGHT:
One need not travel the vast expanses of time and space
to end cosmic kamma. By mastering the microscopic process
of kamma right at the mind in the immediate present,
the macro-scale universe is dismantled.

The Architecture of Bondage

Unlike physical chains, the Buddha discovered that bondage is purely mental.



① **Ignorance**
Delusion regarding the Four Noble Truths.

② **Feeling**
The immediate result of past *kamma*.

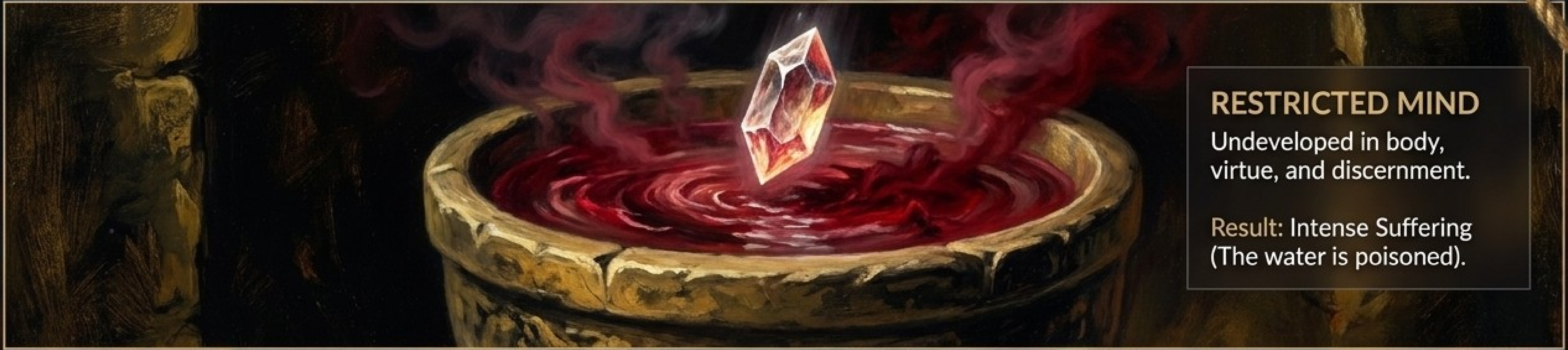
③ **Craving & Clinging**
The mental response to feeling (subtle greed/aversion).

④ **Becoming & Action**
The creation of new *kamma*.

***Discernment* breaks the cycle here.**

Contextual Impact: The Salt & The River

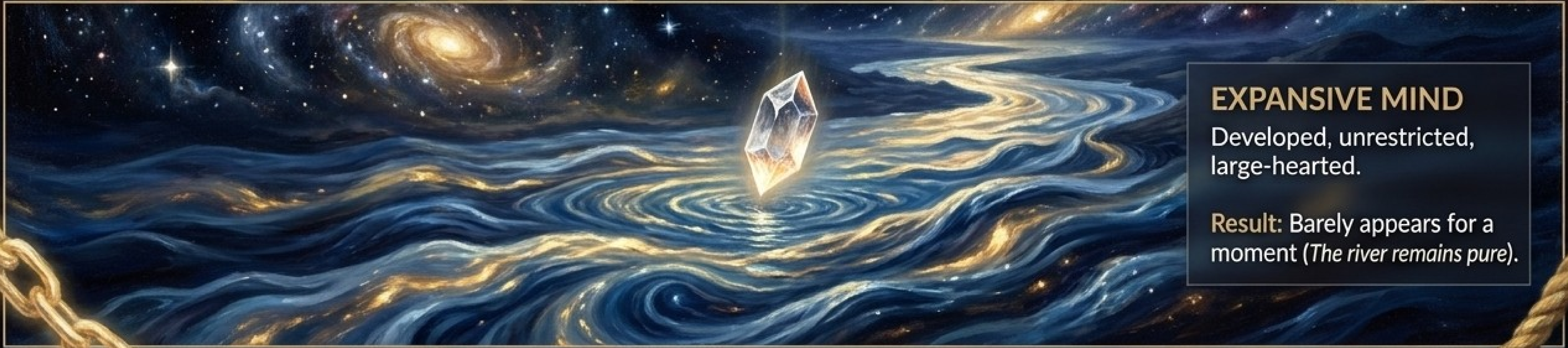
A trifling evil act has vastly different results depending on the expansiveness of the mind experiencing it.



RESTRICTED MIND

Undeveloped in body, virtue, and discernment.

Result: Intense Suffering (The water is poisoned).



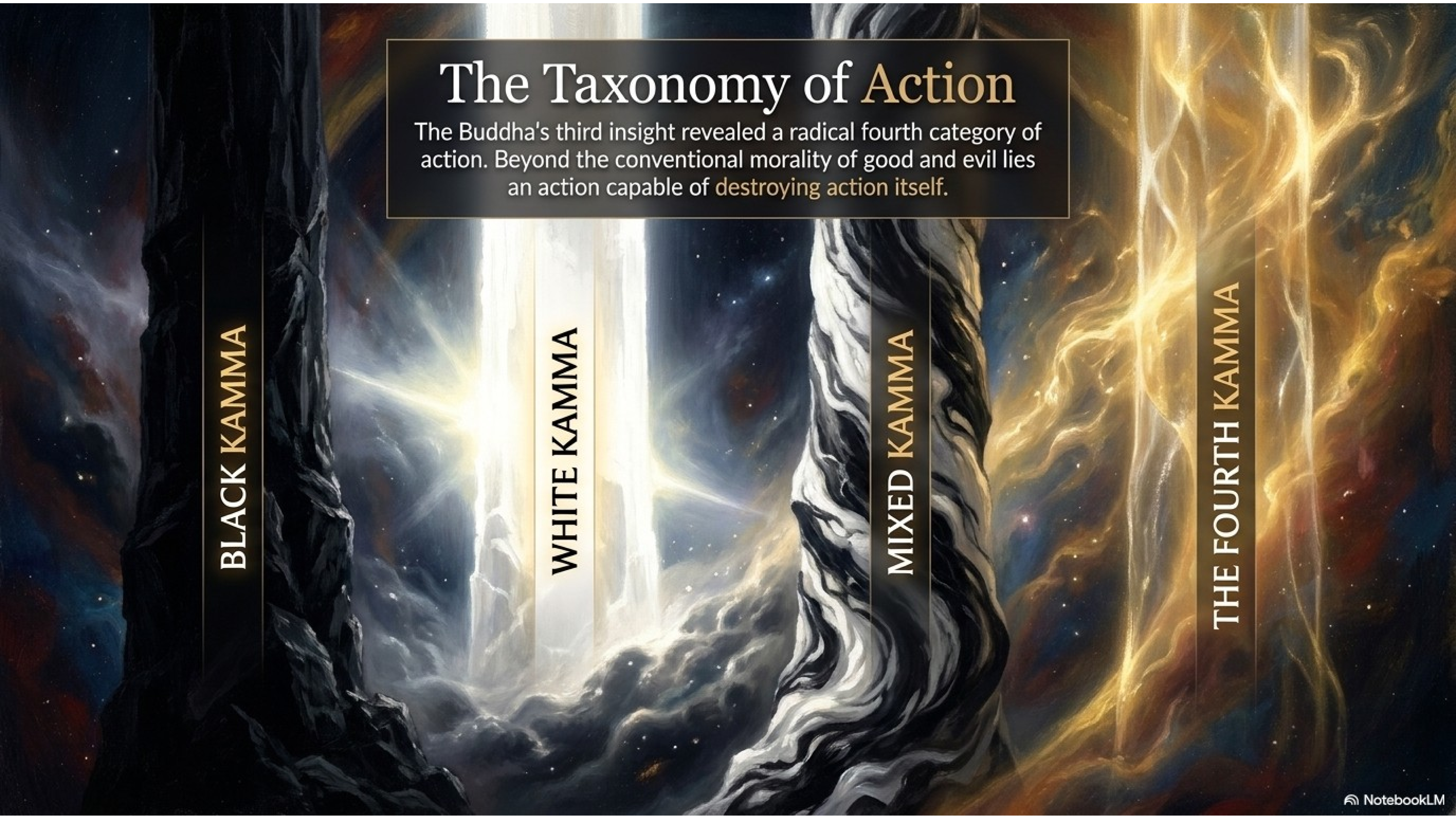
EXPANSIVE MIND

Developed, unrestricted, large-hearted.

Result: Barely appears for a moment (*The river remains pure*).

The Taxonomy of Action

The Buddha's third insight revealed a radical fourth category of action. Beyond the conventional morality of good and evil lies an action capable of destroying action itself.



BLACK KAMMA

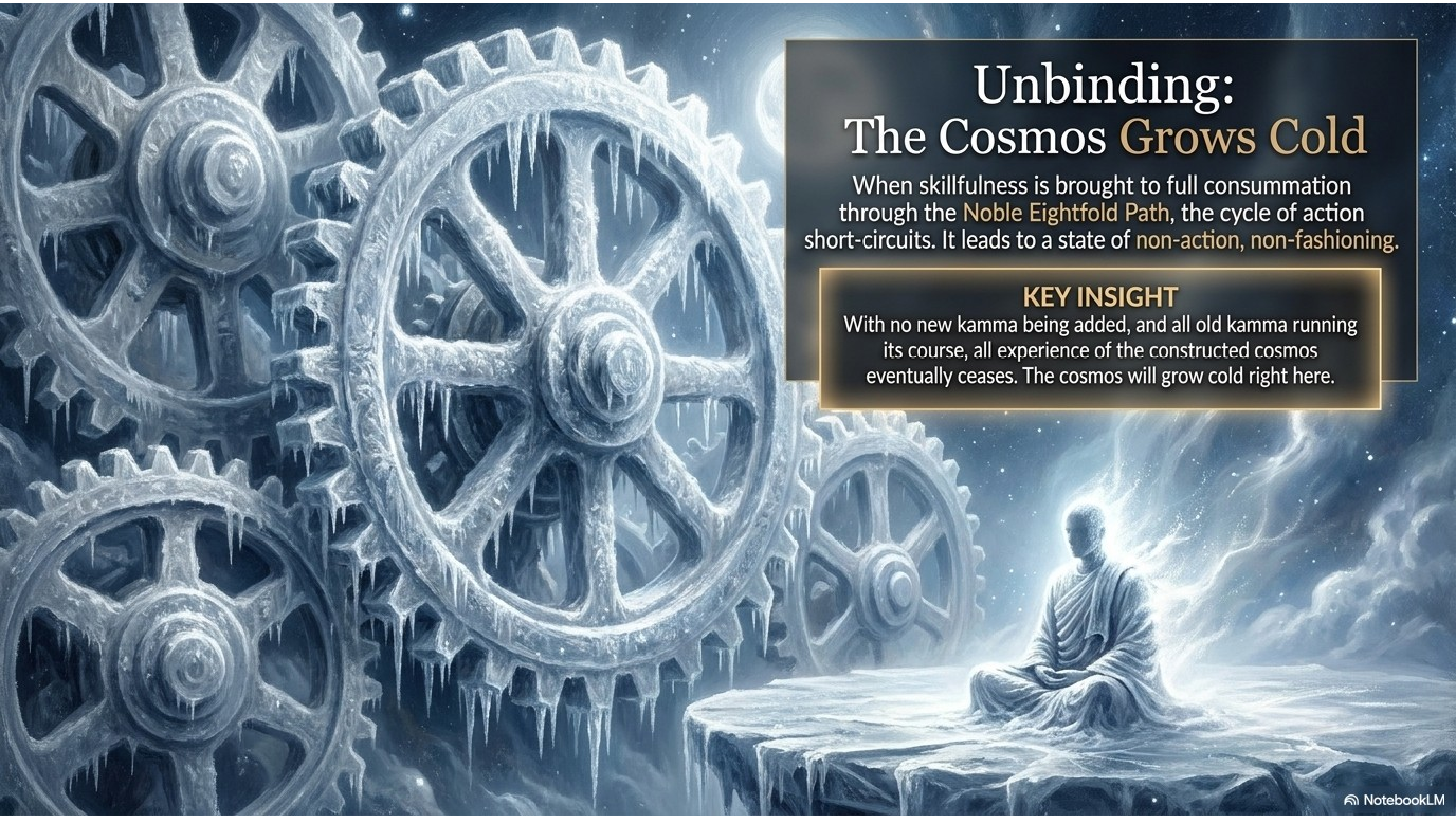
WHITE KAMMA

MIXED KAMMA

THE FOURTH KAMMA

The Four Types of Kamma

Type of Action	Intent	Action	Destination / Result
Black Kamma	Injurious	Killing, stealing, lying	Exclusively painful (Hell)
White Kamma	Uninjurious	Abstaining from harm	Exclusively pleasant (Heaven)
Mixed Kamma	Both	Injurious & Uninjurious	Pleasure mingled with pain (Human realm)
The Fourth Kamma	To abandon the other three	The Noble Eightfold Path	**THE ENDING OF KAMMA**



Unbinding: The Cosmos Grows Cold

When skillfulness is brought to full consummation through the Noble Eightfold Path, the cycle of action short-circuits. It leads to a state of non-action, non-fashioning.

KEY INSIGHT

With no new kamma being added, and all old kamma running its course, all experience of the constructed cosmos eventually ceases. The cosmos will grow cold right here.

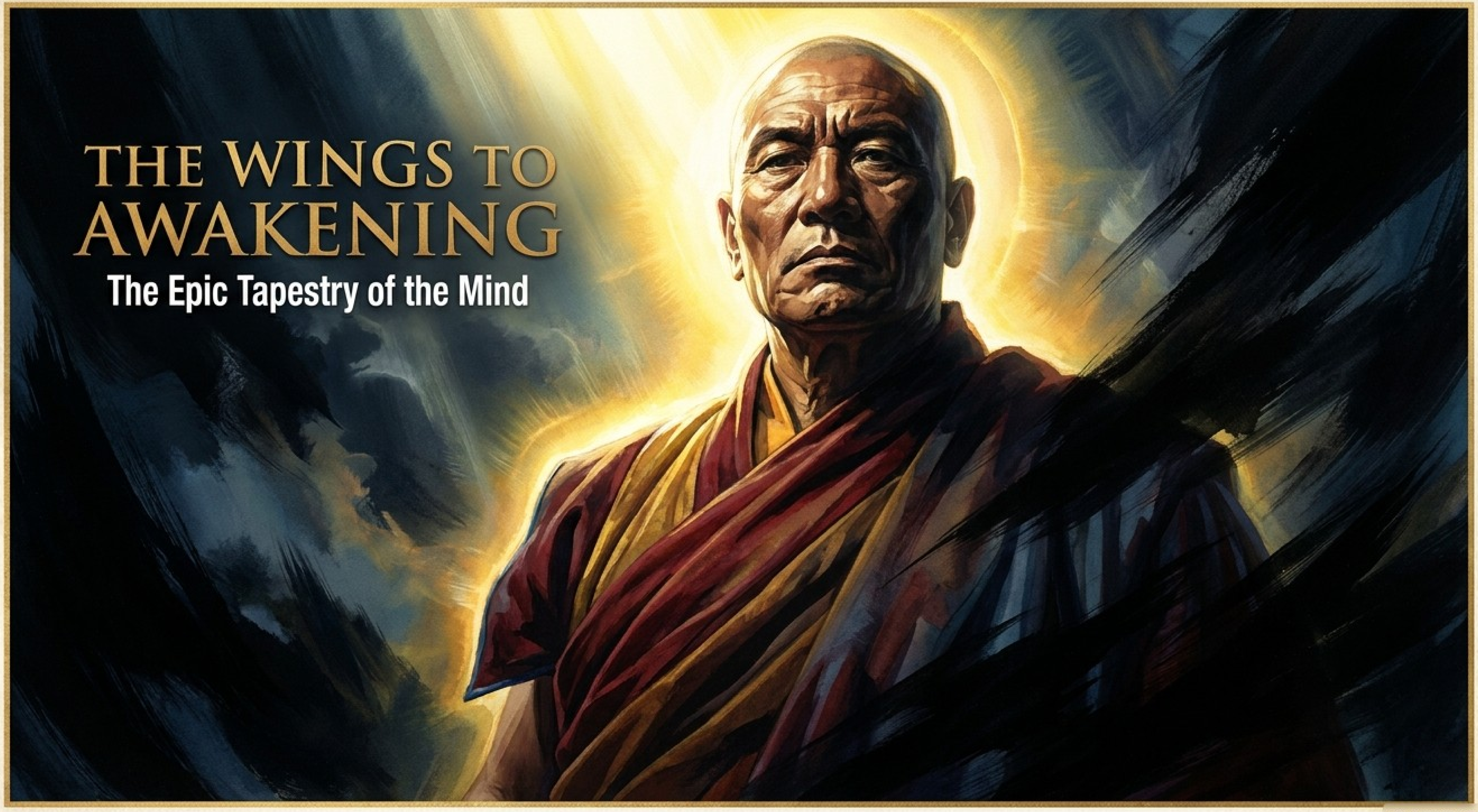
The Call to Skillfulness

Why did the Buddha use grand narratives of heaven, hell, and endless cosmic tears? Not for metaphysical debate, but as a persuasive tool.

THE SYNTHESIS INSIGHT

The staggering weight of the cosmos (the macro) is designed to give you the urgency to master the phenomenology of the present moment (the micro).

Faith in the mechanics of kamma is the necessary working hypothesis for liberation.



THE WINGS TO AWAKENING

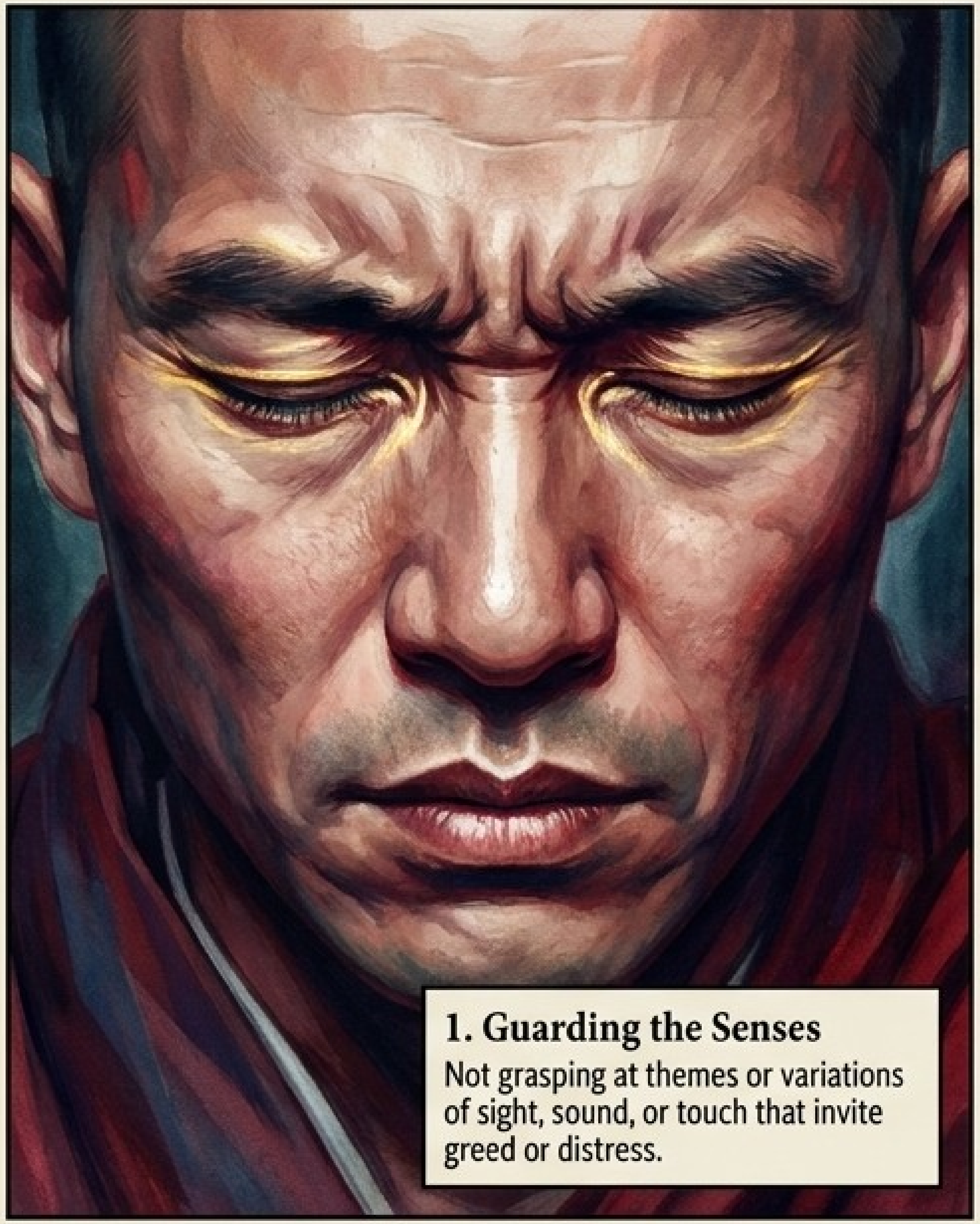
The Epic Tapestry of the Mind

The Call to Battle

When a disciple of the noble ones, shaving off his hair and beard, clothing himself in the ochre robe, makes up his mind to go forth from the home life into homelessness, on that occasion the divine sound sounds forth among the devas: 'This disciple of the noble ones has made up his mind to do battle with Māra.'
— §24

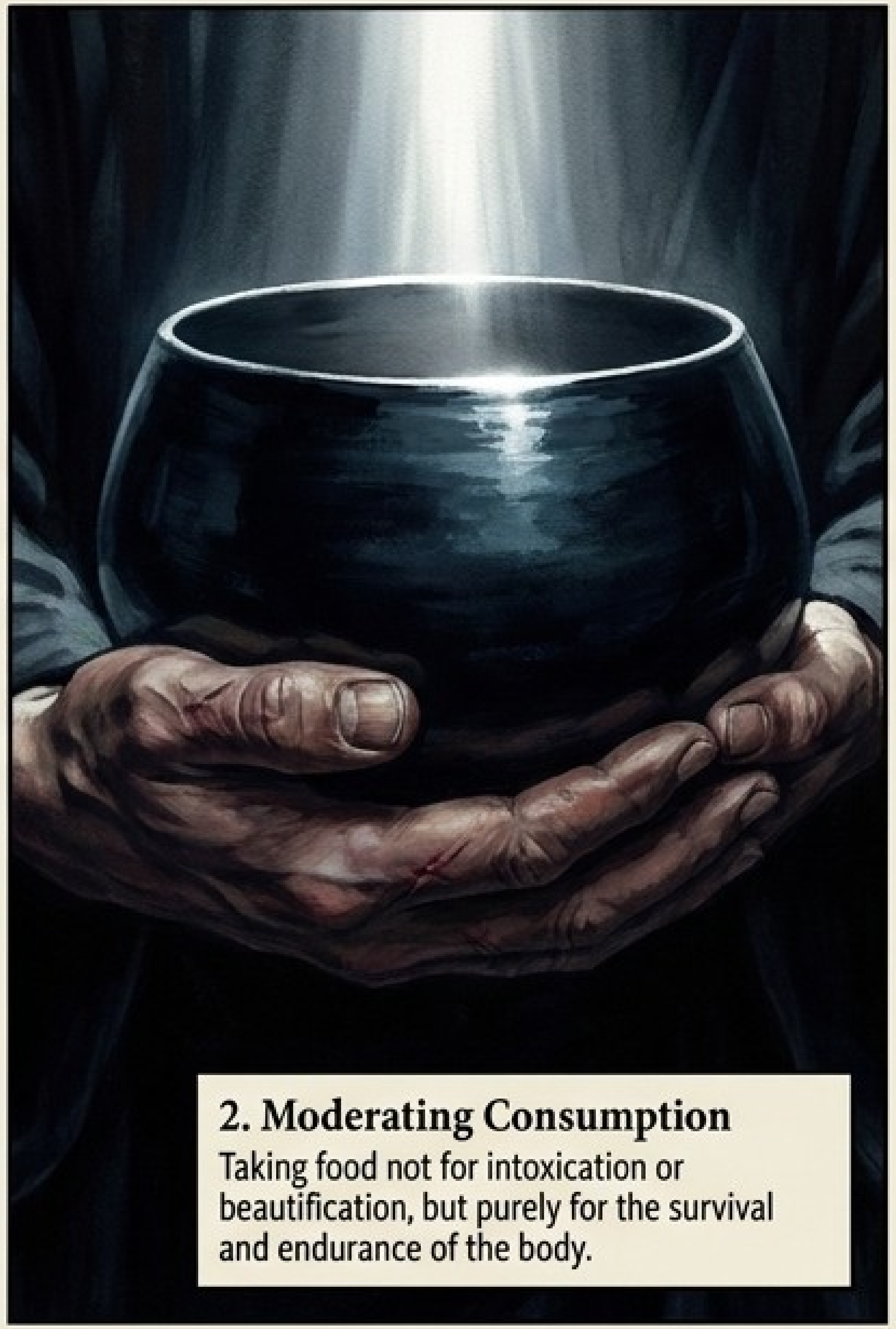
The Warrior's Foundation

A virtuous life is the absolute prerequisite for the path. It prevents the mind from being assailed by unskillful qualities and creates the lack of remorse necessary for intense concentration. The foundation rests on three active disciplines:



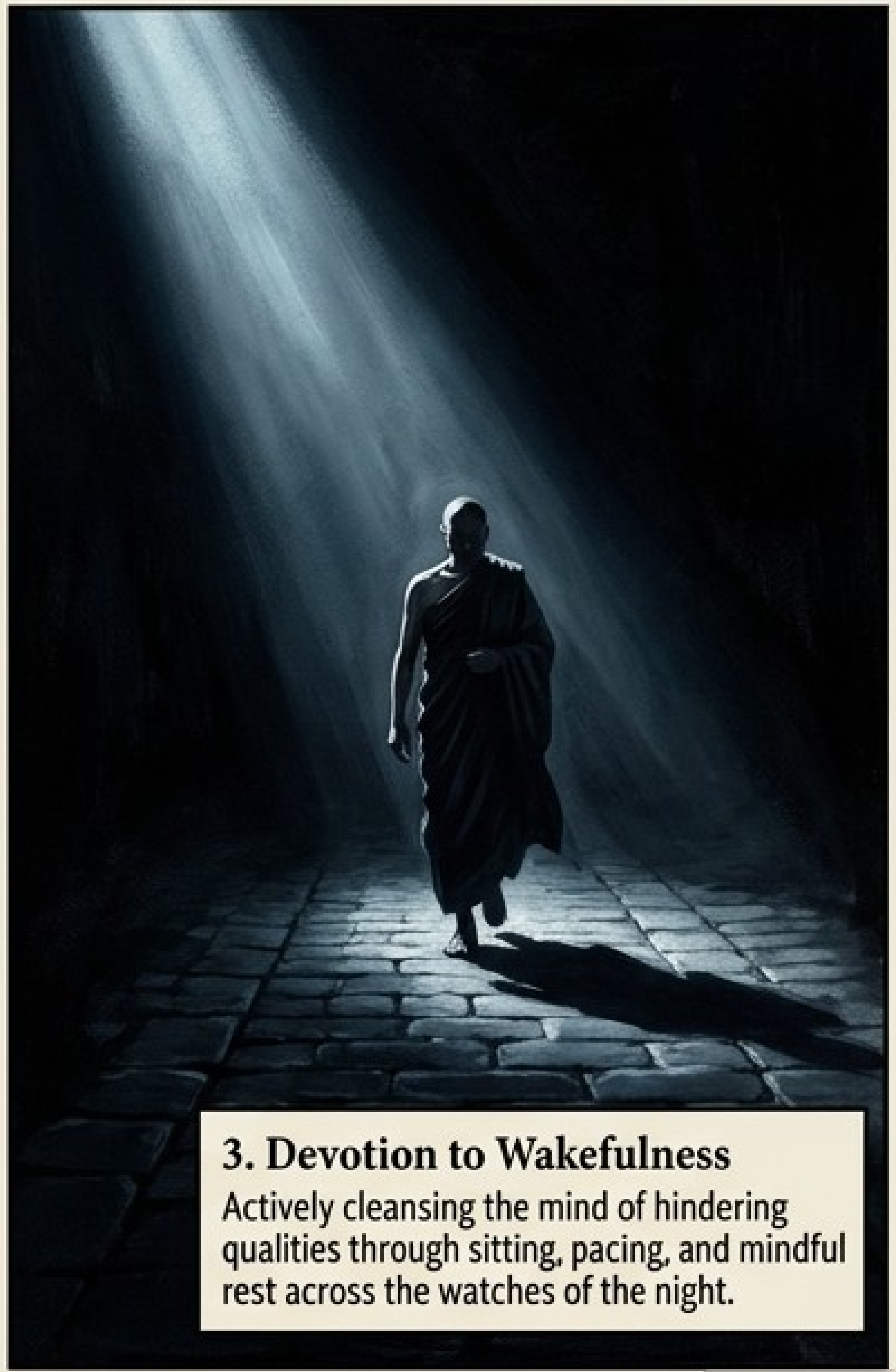
1. Guarding the Senses

Not grasping at themes or variations of sight, sound, or touch that invite greed or distress.



2. Moderating Consumption

Taking food not for intoxication or beautification, but purely for the survival and endurance of the body.



3. Devotion to Wakefulness

Actively cleansing the mind of hindering qualities through sitting, pacing, and mindful rest across the watches of the night.

The Treasures of the Teaching

Just as the ocean hides pearls, sapphires, and lapis lazuli, the Buddha described these seven sets of qualities as the ultimate treasures of his doctrine.

Together, they form the complete arsenal required for self-Awakening.

The Arsenal:

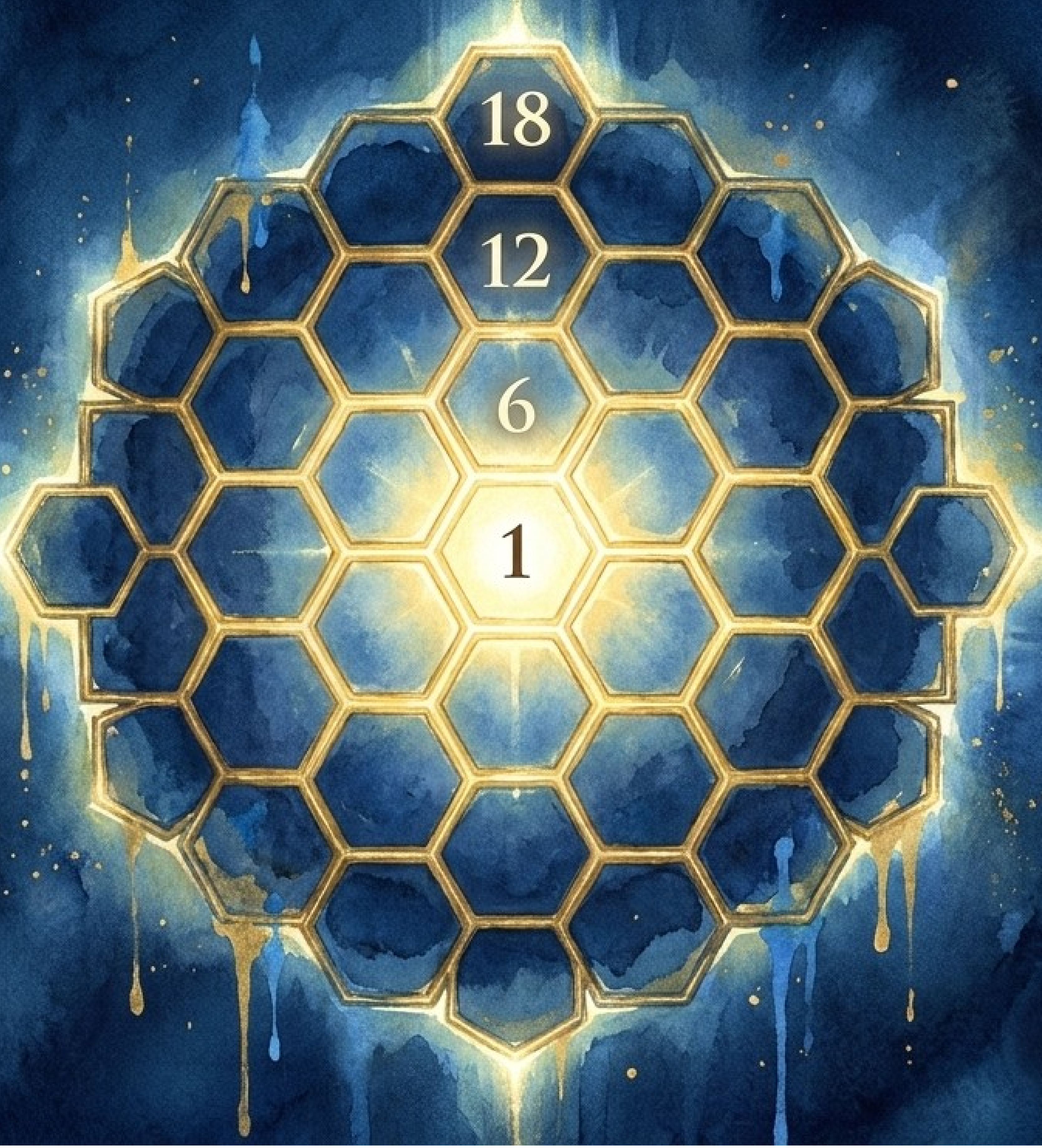
- The Four Frames of Reference
- The Four Right Exertions
- The Four Bases of Power
- The Five Faculties
- The Five Strengths
- The Seven Factors for Awakening
- The Noble Eightfold Path

The Sacred Geometry of Thirty-Seven

The 37 factors are not an arbitrary list. In ancient times, the multiplication tables used to calculate ratios for tuning musical instruments were arranged in hexagonal patterns.

A complete table for reciprocal scales featured 1 core member surrounded by three hexagonal rings of 6, 12, and 18—totaling exactly 37.

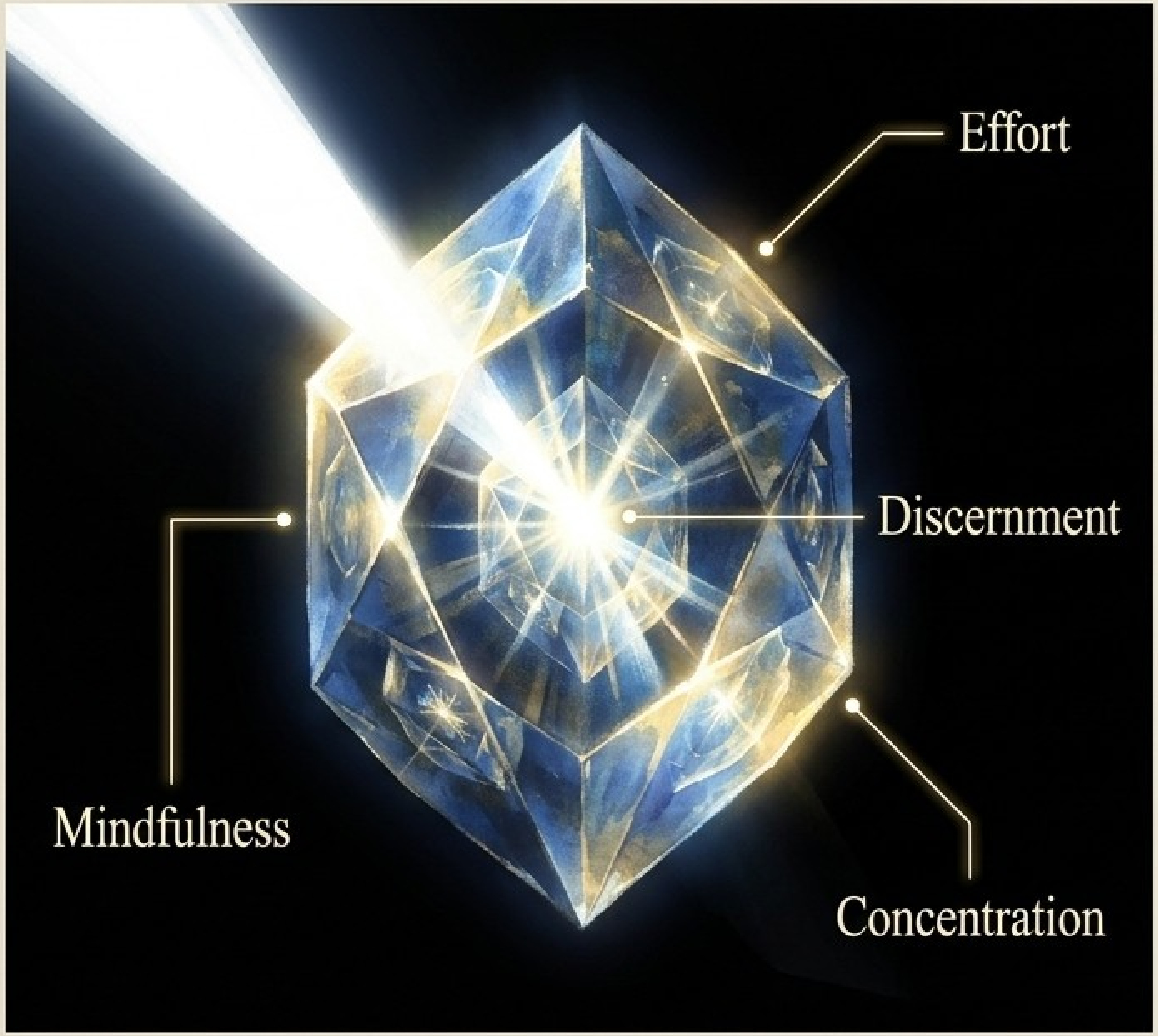
By mastering these 37 factors, the practitioner (Samana) literally becomes "in tune" (sama) with the truth, achieving basic completeness.



NotebookLM

The Holographic Architecture

The first type of sets—the Frames of Reference (mindfulness), Right Exertions (effort), and Bases of Power (concentration)—function holographically.


Effort
Discernment
Mindfulness
Concentration

Every single piece contains the whole.

The proper development of any one of these sets inherently involves the other two, bound together by the factor of discernment.

You cannot isolate one weapon; to draw one is to wield them all.

NotebookLM

The Upward Spiral

The second type of sets—the Faculties, Strengths, Factors for Awakening, and Eightfold Path—do not act simultaneously. They operate as causal chains progressing through a spiraling loop.

Each factor triggers the next, ultimately leading back to the beginning to reinforce the base with greater sensitivity. As the path spirals through these feedback loops, it exercises the mind, growing stronger with every rotation until Awakening is achieved.

The Feedback Loop Matrix

The sequences of the causal loops differ across the sets, yet they reveal a unified underlying architecture: Concentration is always dependent upon, and follows, the correct application of Effort and Mindfulness.

Faculties & Strengths

Sequence:
Effort →
Mindfulness →
Concentration →
Discernment

Factors for Awakening

Sequence:
Mindfulness →
Discernment →
Effort →
Concentration

Noble Eightfold Path

Sequence:
Discernment →
Effort →
Mindfulness →
Concentration

The Chief Wing: Discernment

Of all the wings to self-Awakening, discernment is chief. — §77.

Discernment is the most variegated weapon in the arsenal. In its rudimentary form, it evaluates what is skillful and unskillful, creating the conditions for right effort. As the feedback loop accelerates, concentration provides the steady foundation required for discernment to become a precise, highly sensitive measuring tool. Ultimately, this mundane discernment is transformed into transcendent clear knowing, leading directly to release.

The State of Non-Fashioning

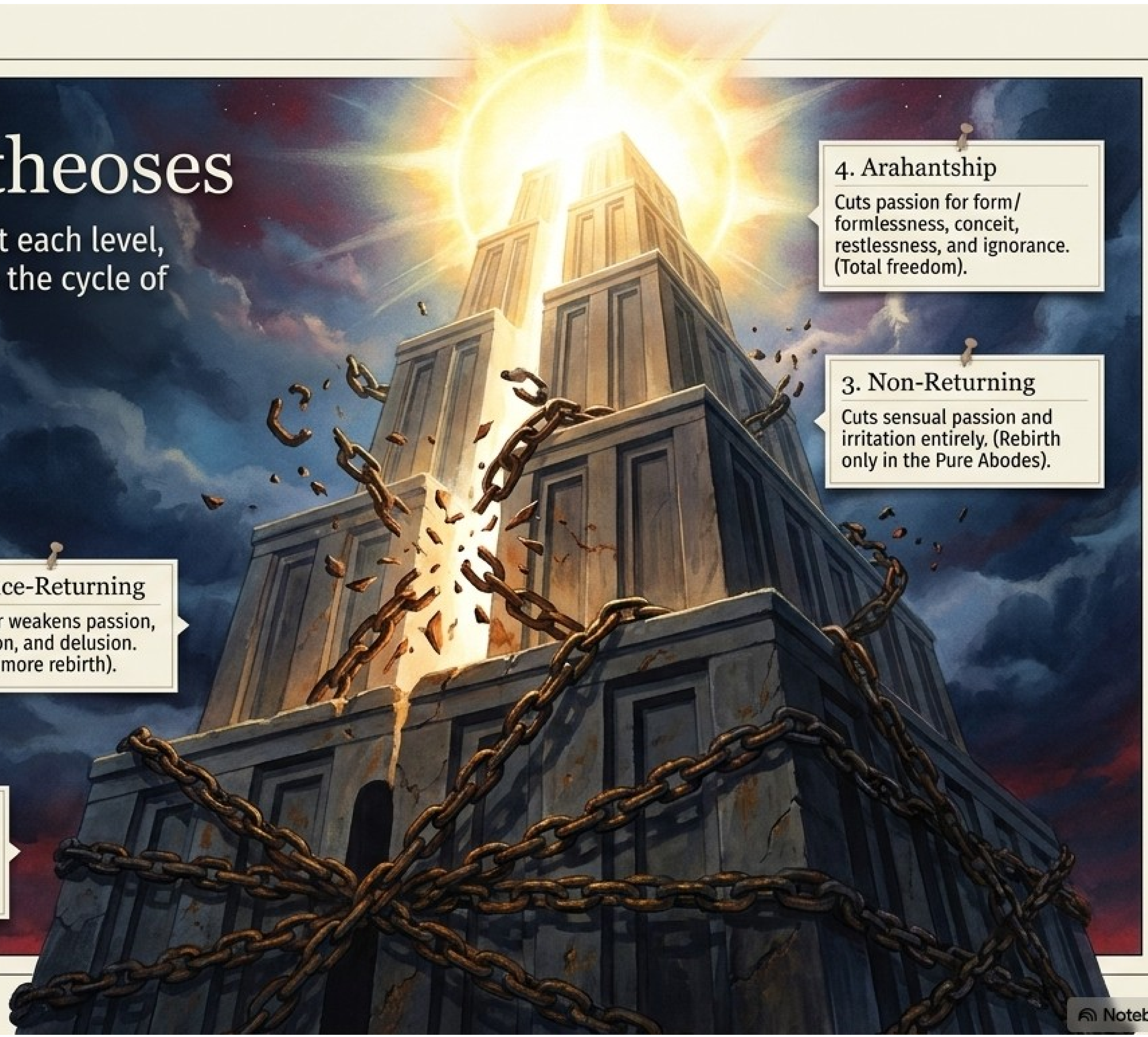
The dynamic goal of all four levels of Awakening is identical: bringing the mind to a state of non-fashioning (atammayata).

Through the mastery of virtue, concentration, and discernment, all present input into the cycle of kamma is entirely suspended.

By mastering the processes of kamma to the point where nothing new is fabricated, the mind opens the way for the experience of the Unfabricated.

The Four Apotheoses

Awakening is a staged ascension. At each level, specific fetters binding the mind to the cycle of rebirth are permanently severed.



4. Arahantship

Cuts passion for form/formlessness, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. (Total freedom).

3. Non-Returning

Cuts sensual passion and irritation entirely. (Rebirth only in the Pure Abodes).

2. Once-Returning

Further weakens passion, aversion, and delusion. (Max 1 more rebirth).

1. Stream-Entry

Cuts self-identity views, uncertainty, and grasping at habits. (Max 7 more rebirths).

The Maturation of the Path

The four levels differ in the relative maturity of the path factors that lead up to them. The practitioner ascends as their mastery over the three core domains becomes absolute.

Stream-Entry

Occurs at the full maturation of Virtue.

Non-Returning

Occurs at the full maturation of Concentration.

Arahantship

Occurs at the full maturation of Discernment.

Total Unbinding

When a disciple of the noble ones, through the ending of effluents dwells in the effluent-free awareness-release...
on that occasion the divine sound sounds forth among the devas:

‘This disciple of the noble ones has won the battle. Having been in the front lines of the battle, he now dwells victorious.”
— §24

The end of the cycle. The experience of the Unfabricated. Total Unbinding.

THE FOUR FRAMES OF REFERENCE

The Epic Architecture of Awakening

The Four Frames of Reference (*Satipaṭṭhāna*) are the foundational teachings for a meditator's attention. They map the progression from a wild, untamed mind to a state of supreme mastery and liberation.

Sati + Paṭṭhāna

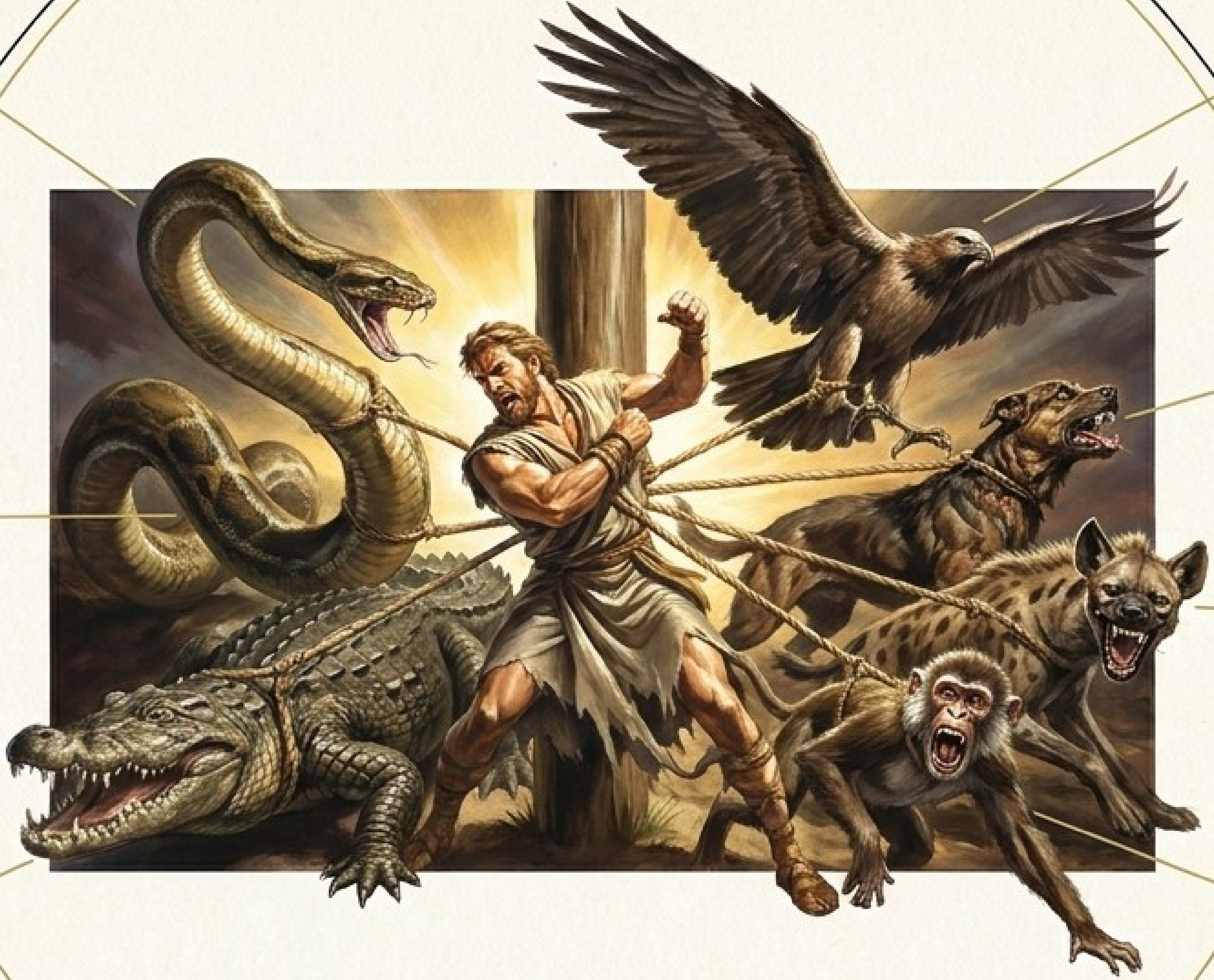
The Foundation
The object kept in mind

The process of investigation becomes the object investigated.

Sati + Upaṭṭhāna

The Approach
Establishing closely

The Buddha’s poetic genius: The what merges with the how.



The Eye:
Pulling toward pleasing forms (anthill)

The Ear:
Pulling toward toward pleasing sounds (water)

The Ear:
Pulling toward pleasing sounds (water)

The Nose:
Pulling toward pleasing smells (air)

The Tongue:
Pulling toward pleasing tastes (village)

The Body:
Pulling toward tactile sensations (charnel ground)

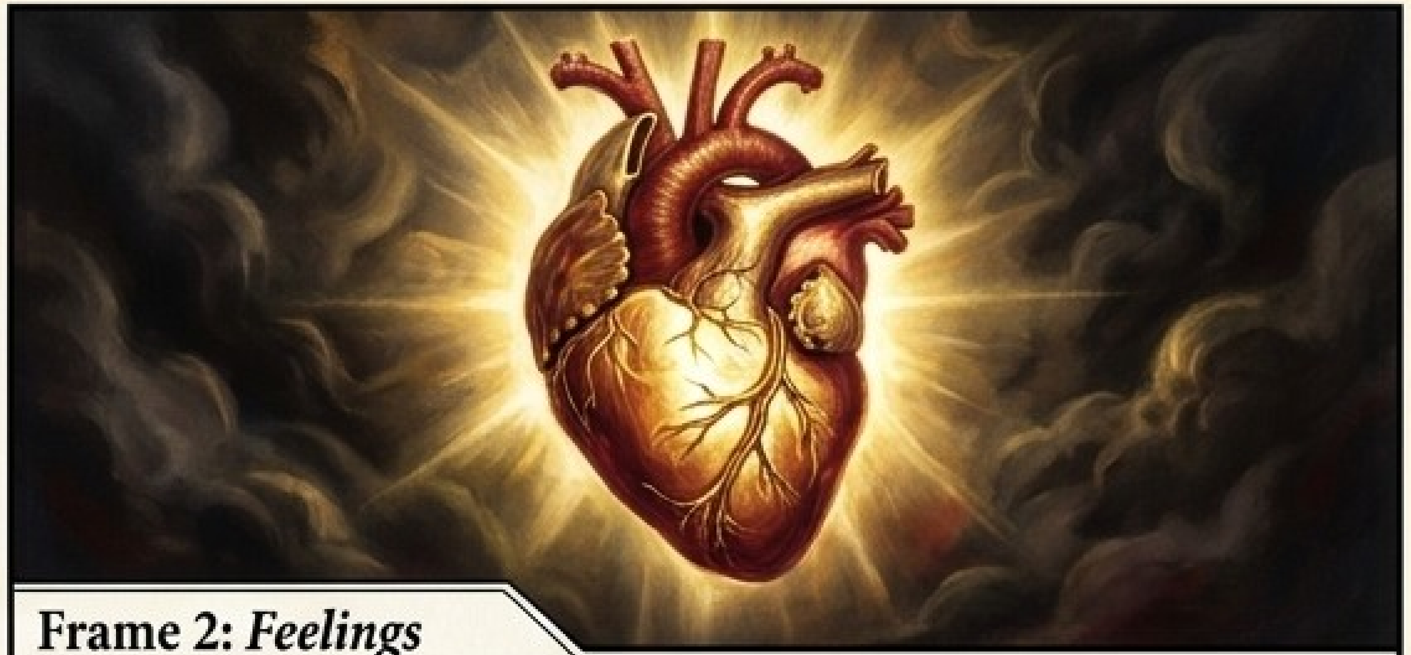
The Intellect:
Pulling toward pleasing ideas (forest)

Without a post, the mind is dragged to exhaustion by competing sensual inputs. The strong post that forces them to submit is mindfulness immersed in the body.

Frame 1: *Body*

Domain: Physicality, Breath, Elements

Goal: Abandoning desire for the body



Frame 2: *Feelings*

Domain: Pleasure, Pain, Neutral

Goal: Abandoning desire for feeling

Frame 3: *Mind*

Domain: Passion, Aversion, Delusion, Concentration
Goal: Discerning states of release

Frame 4: *Mental Qualities*

Domain: Hindrances, Aggregates, Awakening Factors
Goal: Realizing the Deathless

These frames are experienced strictly in and of themselves—not viewed by their utility in the world, but simply as they appear to direct experience.

Every object of mindfulness—whether breath, feeling, or mind state—progresses through this exact three-stage ascension.

Stage 1: The Frame

Action: Concentrating on the present event. Secluding the mind from sensual preoccupations to reach the First Jhāna.

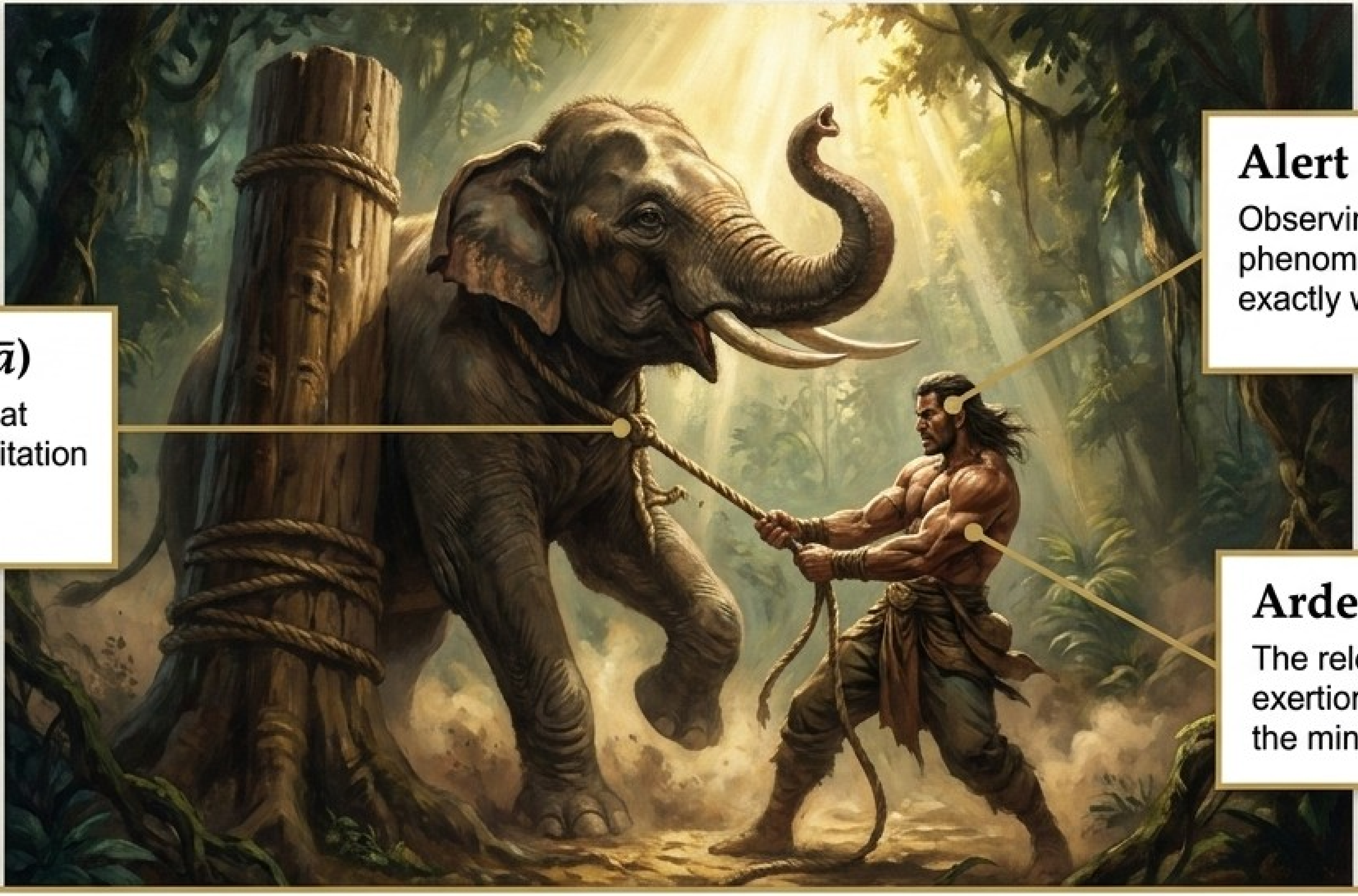
Stage 2: Causality

Action: Manipulating the origination and passing away of phenomena. Actively cultivating skillful qualities.

Stage 3: Equipoise

Action: Non-fashioning. Transcendent release and entry into emptiness.

Prestige Format Graphic Novel



Mindful (*satimā*)

Remembering the task at hand. Keeping the meditation theme strictly in mind.

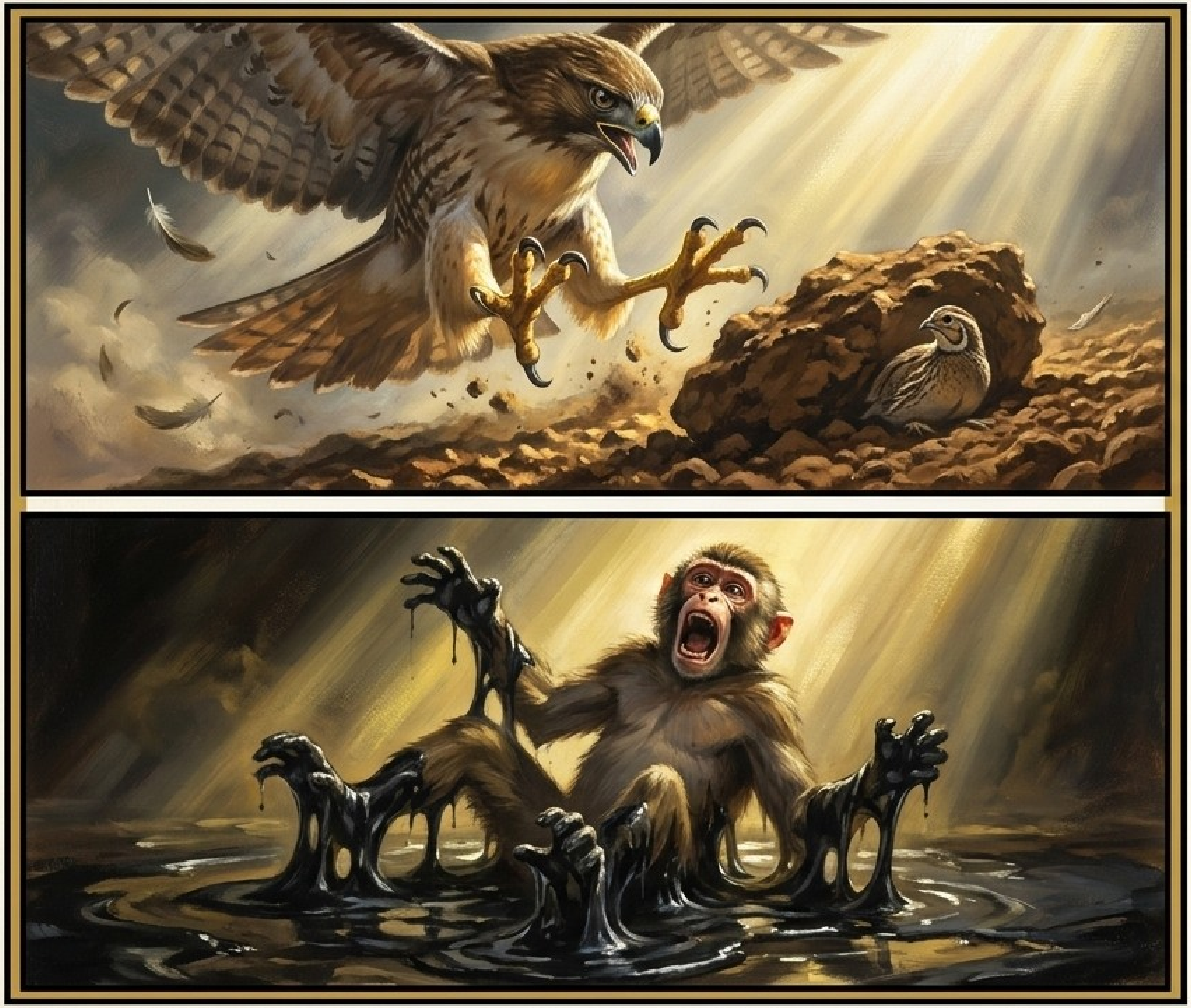
Alert (*sampajāno*)

Observing the present phenomena clearly, knowing exactly when the mind slips.

Ardent (*ātāpī*)

The relentless, skillful exertion required to return the mind to its proper theme.

Just as a trainer binds a forest elephant by the neck to break its forest habits…
…these four frames are bindings to break the awareness of its worldly habits.



The Hawk’s Domain

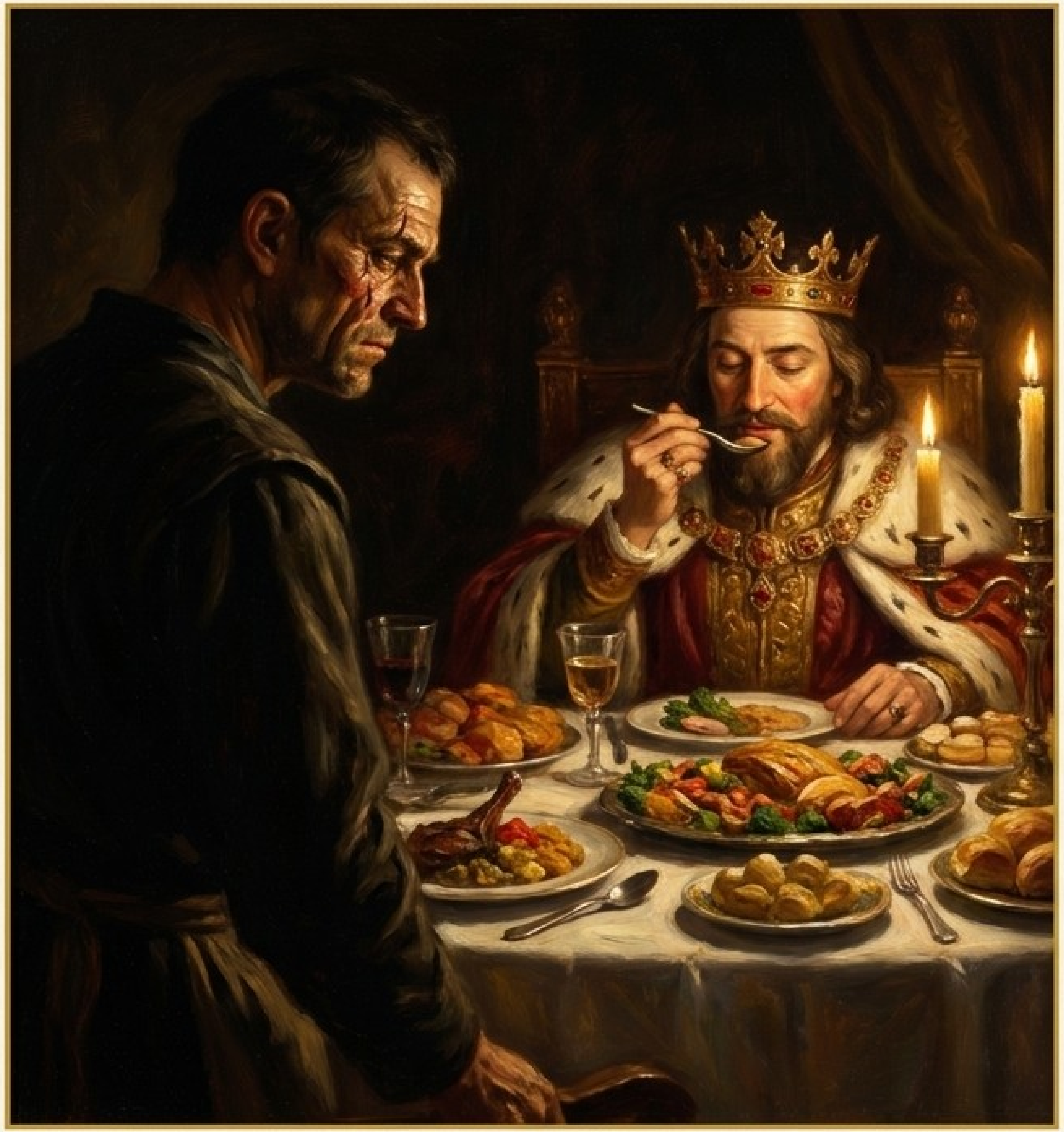
Sensuality: Wandering into the five strings of sensuality (forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations) makes one prey to Māra (Distraction/Death).

The Tar Trap

Clinging: Grabbing at sensory traps ensnares the mind completely, limb by limb, until it is entirely helpless.

The Ancestral Territory

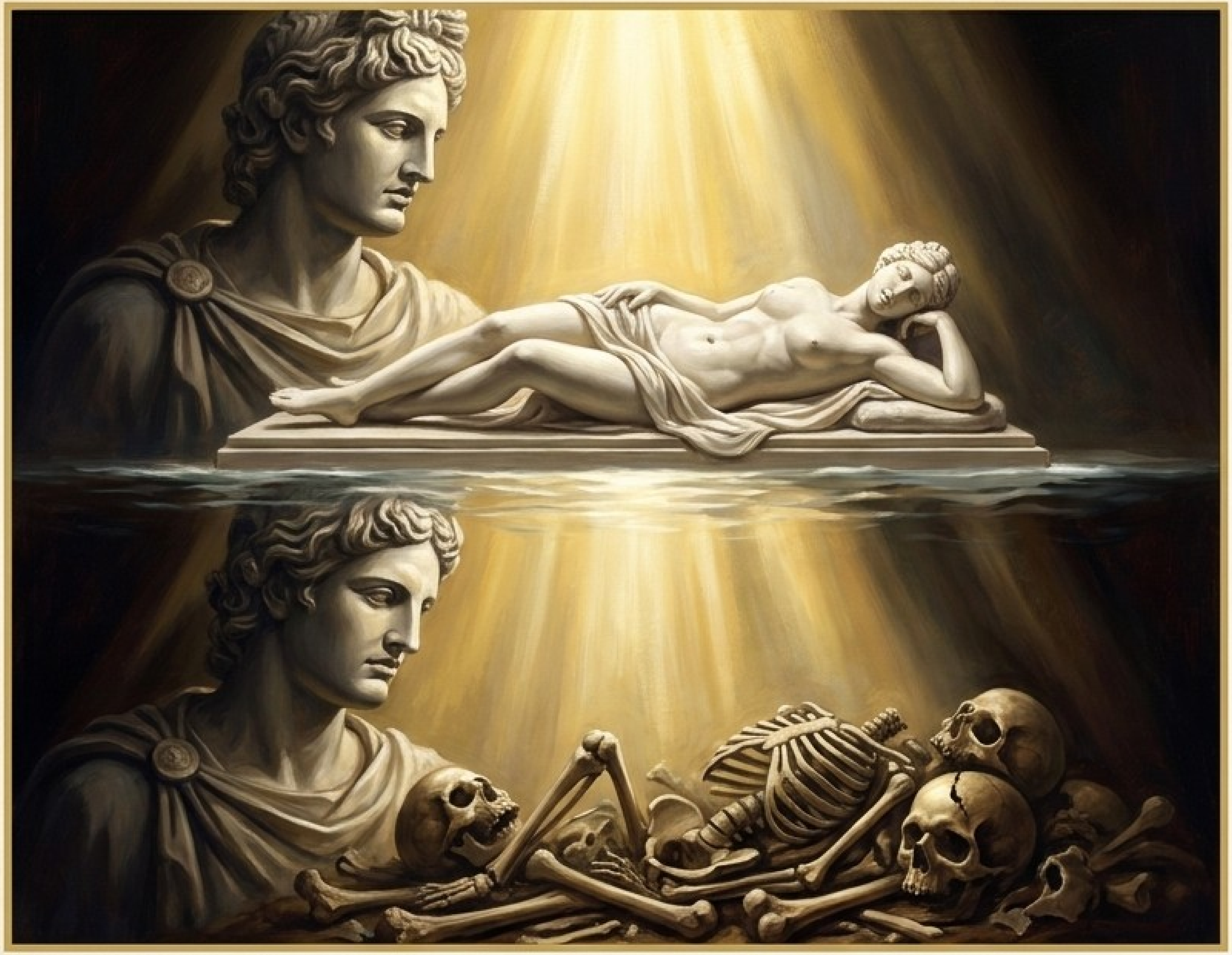
Invincibility: The meditator must remain strictly within their “proper range”—the Four Frames of Reference. Behind the clod of earth (mindfulness), the hawk shatters its own breast.



Passive Observation	Active Manipulation
“Merely watching neutral events (like the breath or aggregates) pass by to see what factors accompany them.”	Like a wise cook noting what curries the King reaches for, the meditator experiments with mental qualities to see what leads to concentration.

Key Insight

“Meditation requires active participation. You discover the causal relationships of dependent co-arising by taking an active role—maximizing skillful qualities and abandoning the unskillful—just as one learns about eggs by trying to cook with them.”



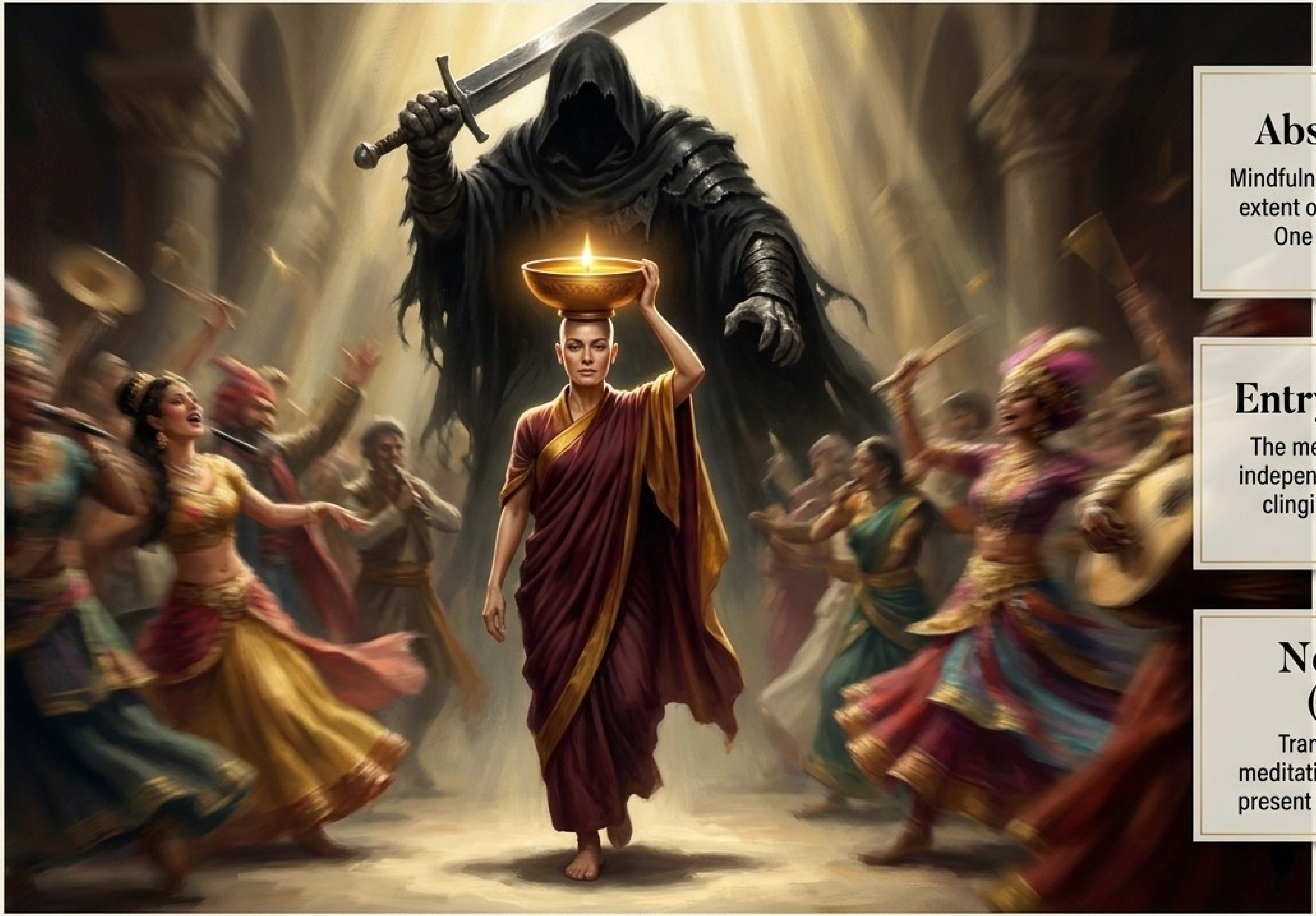
Rule 1: Controlling Passion

Viewing the unloathsome as loathsome (e.g., seeing the body merely as skin, fat, bones, and fluids).

Rule 2: Controlling Aversion

Viewing the loathsome as unloathsome (e.g., maintaining unwavering good will toward the repulsive).

All bodies are equal at the skin level. The true obstacle to equanimity is not the object of lust or hate itself, but the arbitrary context in which it is perceived.



Absolute Restraint

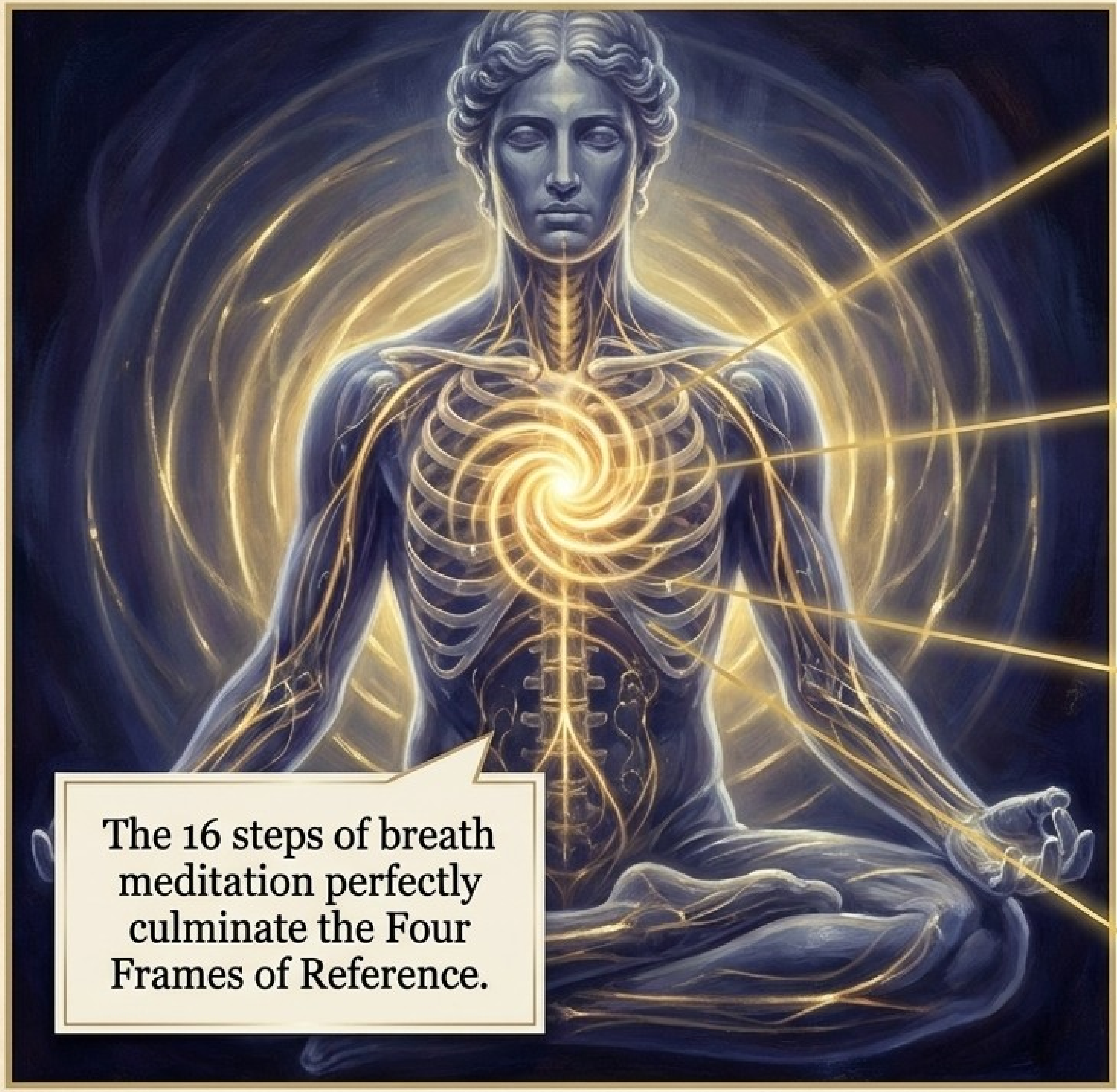
Mindfulness is maintained purely to the extent of knowledge and recollection. One drop spilled means death.

Entry into Emptiness

The meditator becomes completely independent, unsustained by, and not clinging to anything in the world.

Non-Fashioning (Atammayatā)

Transcending even one's own meditative skill. Free from putting any present input into the causal network.



The 16 steps of breath meditation perfectly culminate the Four Frames of Reference.

The Breath (Physicality)

➔ Breathing sensitive to the entire body
➔ Body is established.

The Reaction (Sensation)

➔ Breathing sensitive to rapture and pleasure
➔ Feelings are established.

The State (Awareness)

➔ Breathing steadying and releasing the mind
➔ Mind is established.

The Insight (Release)

➔ Breathing focusing on relinquishment and cessation
➔ Mental Qualities are established.

The Acrobat’s Rule

Is focusing entirely on one’s own mind a selfish act?

“You watch after yourself, and I’ll watch after myself.”

Watching yourself protects others

Maintaining your own balance protects the world from the detrimental effects of your uncontrolled anger.

Watching others protects yourself

Practicing endurance, non-violence, and good will for others keeps your own mind balanced.

The Promise of Practice

Timeline: If developed for seven years... or even just seven days.

The Inevitable Fruits:

1. **Gnosis:** Knowledge of Awakening right here and now.
2. **Non-Return:** If any remnant of clinging remains, one never returns to the lower realms of existence.

Those who taste mindfulness of of the body taste the Deathless.

“Over there are the roots of trees. Over there are empty dwellings. Practice Jhāna. Do not be heedless. Do not be remorseful in the future. That is our instruction to you all.” — The Buddha

The Four Right Exertions

Mastering the Frontier of the Mind

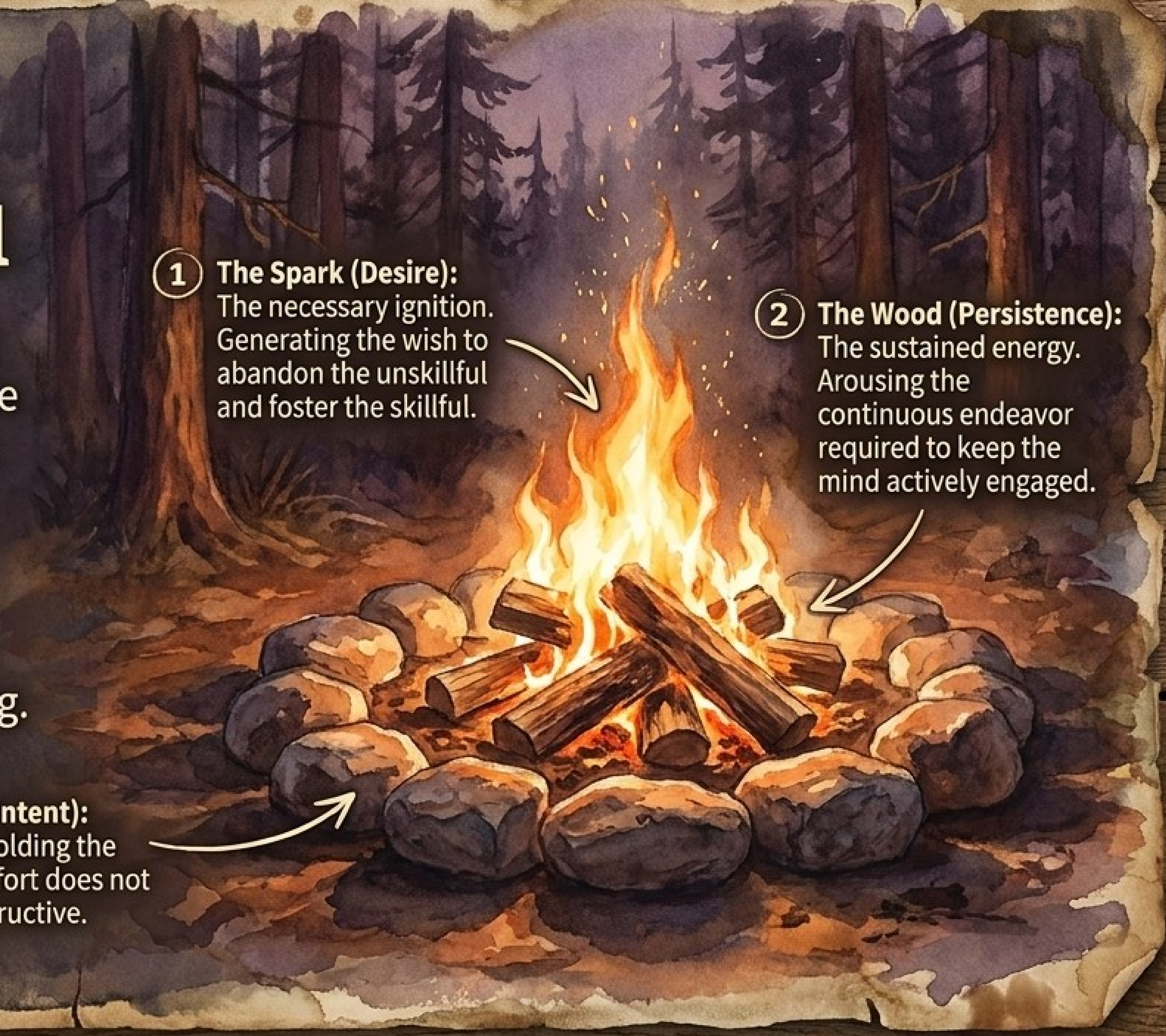
THE ARCHITECTURE OF EFFORT

	UNSKILLFUL QUALITIES	SKILLFUL QUALITIES
UNARISEN (FUTURE)	 **GUARD** Exert intent for the non-arising of evil, unskillful qualities that have not yet arisen.	 **DEVELOP** Endeavor for the arising of skillful qualities that have not yet arisen.
ARISEN (PRESENT)	 **ABANDON** Arouse persistence for the abandoning of evil, unskillful qualities that have already arisen.	 **MAINTAIN** Generate desire for the maintenance, plenitude, and culmination of skillful qualities that have arisen.

Reclaiming Desire as Fuel

Desire is typically seen as the root of suffering. However, the Buddha explicitly taught that skillful desire is necessary to drive right exertion.

It is the controlled burn that powers the path to Awakening.



① **The Spark (Desire):** The necessary ignition. Generating the wish to abandon the unskillful and foster the skillful.

② **The Wood (Persistence):** The sustained energy. Arousing the continuous endeavor required to keep the mind actively engaged.

③ **The Containment Ring (Intent):** The structural focus. Upholding the mind's direction so the effort does not become scattered or destructive.

Exertion 1: Guarding the Perimeter

Guarding is the exertion to prevent unarisen unskillful qualities from taking root. It requires strict restraint over the faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and intellect).

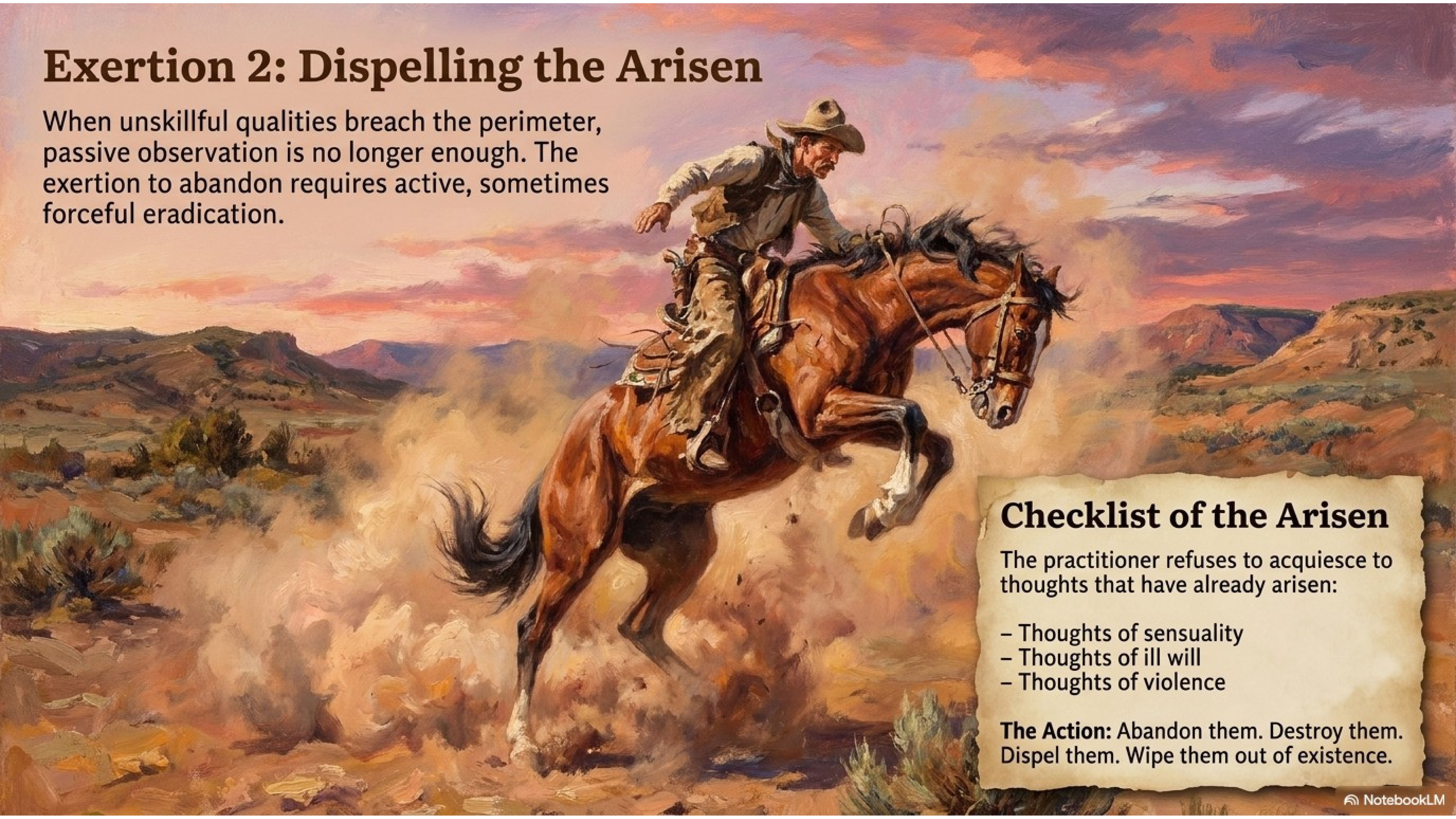
Charles Marion Russell

The Practice of Restraint

When seeing a form or hearing a sound, the practitioner does not grasp at any theme or variation. By refusing to dwell on stimuli without restraint, the mind prevents evil qualities—such as greed or distress—from assailing it. The watchful guard observes the horizon without interfering or inviting the predator in.

Exertion 2: Dispelling the Arisen

When unskillful qualities breach the perimeter, passive observation is no longer enough. The exertion to abandon requires active, sometimes forceful eradication.



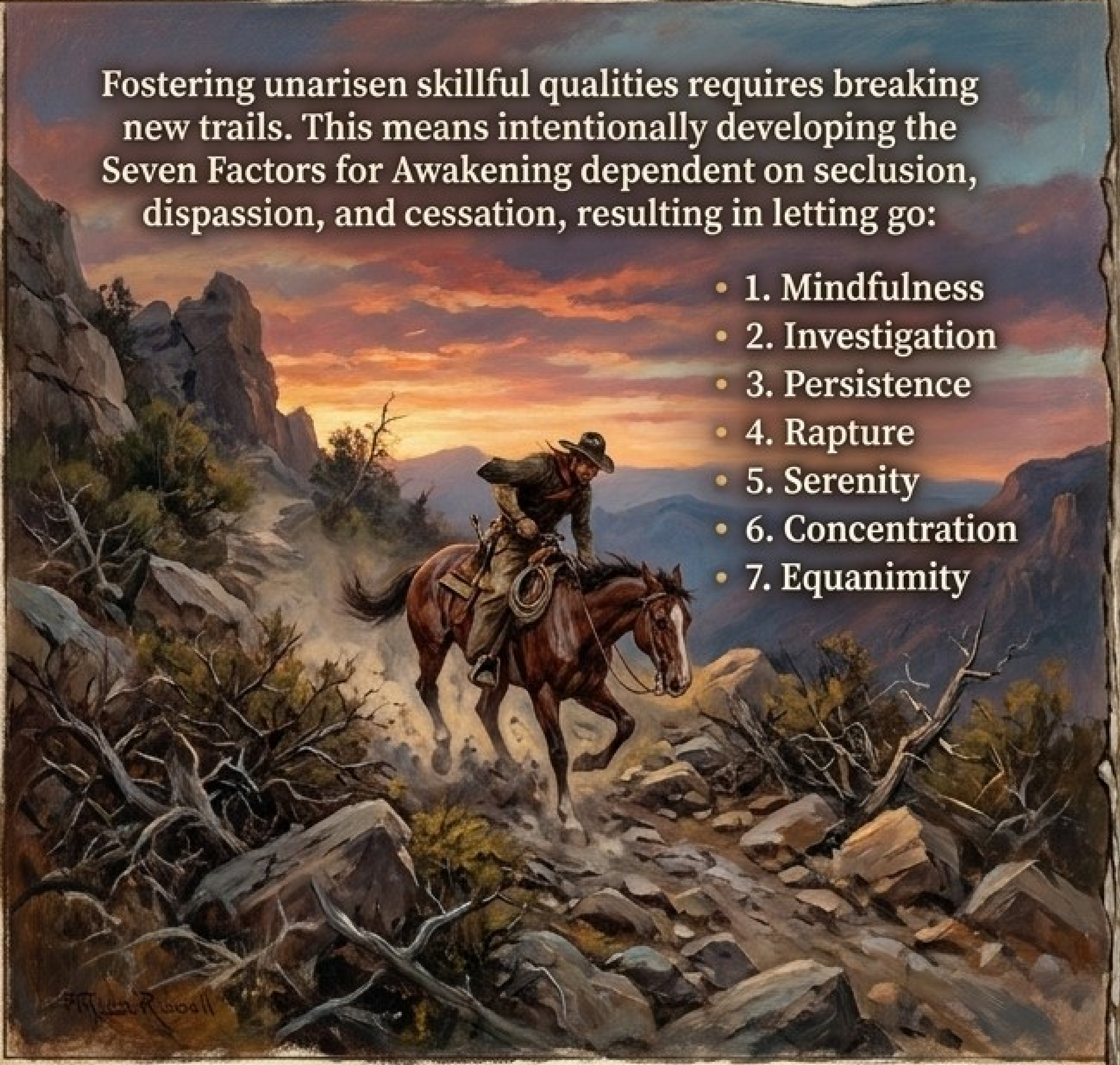
Checklist of the Arisen

The practitioner refuses to acquiesce to thoughts that have already arisen:

- Thoughts of sensuality
- Thoughts of ill will
- Thoughts of violence

The Action: Abandon them. Destroy them. Dispel them. Wipe them out of existence.

Exertions 3 & 4: Developing and Maintaining



Fostering unarisen skillful qualities requires breaking new trails. This means intentionally developing the Seven Factors for Awakening dependent on seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, resulting in letting go:

- 1. Mindfulness
- 2. Investigation
- 3. Persistence
- 4. Rapture
- 5. Serenity
- 6. Concentration
- 7. Equanimity

Once skillful qualities arise, they must not be lost to confusion. Maintaining requires keeping the mind anchored to a favorable theme of concentration (such as mindfulness of the body's impermanence) until the practice reaches plenitude and culmination.

The 7 Tactics for Abandoning Effluents

The meditator must carefully choose the right tool for the specific unskillful quality.
There is no doctrinaire approach; personal exploration and appropriate attention are required.

Seeing: Abandon identity-view and doubt by discerning which ideas are fit for attention.

Restraining: Guarding the sense faculties to prevent vexation.

Using: Utilizing food, clothing, and shelter merely for survival, not intoxication or beautification.

Tolerating: Enduring cold, hunger, and ill-spoken words without mental distress.

Avoiding: Bypassing unsuitable habitats and bad friends.

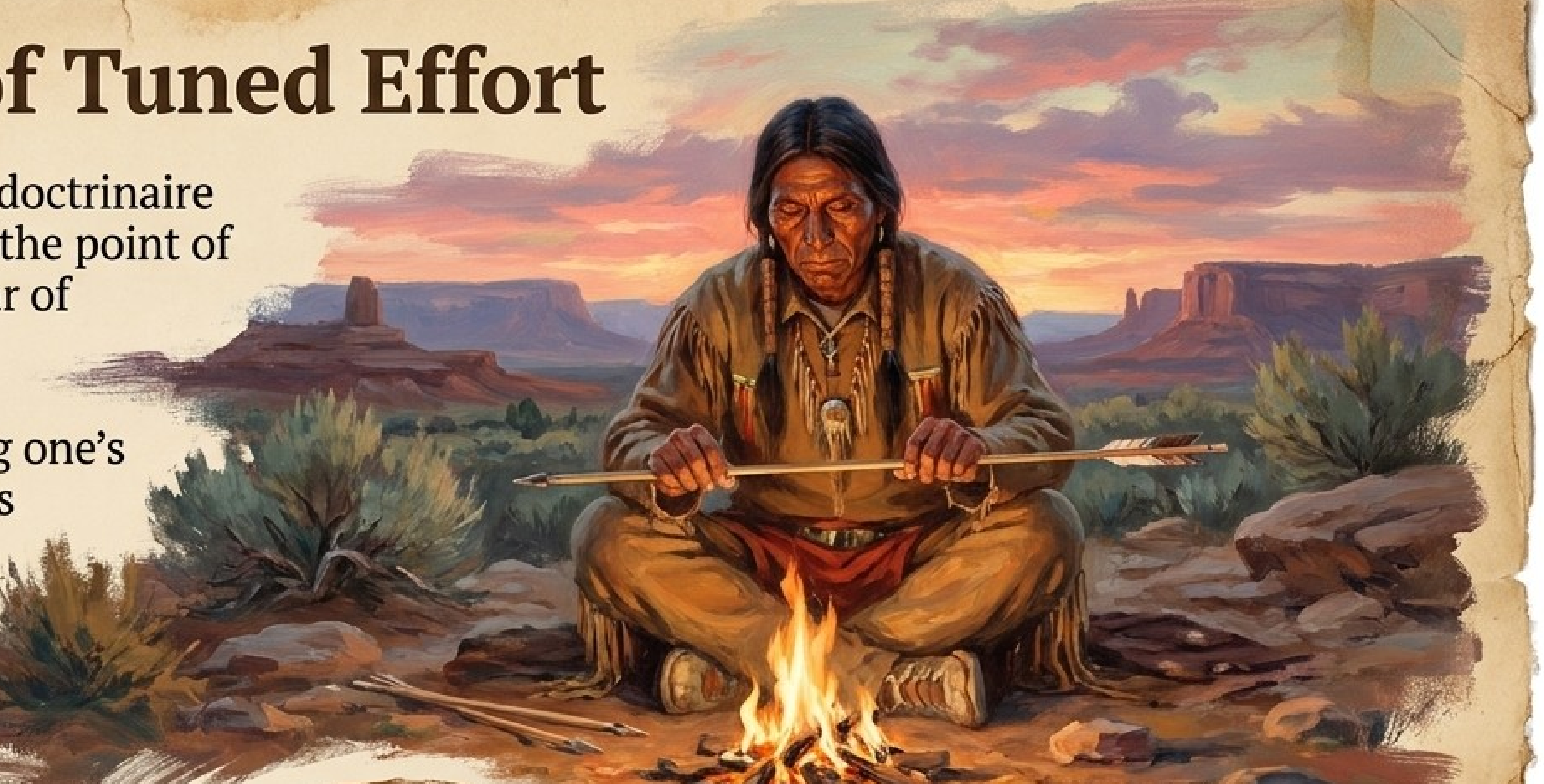
Destroying: Wiping out arisen thoughts of ill will or violence.

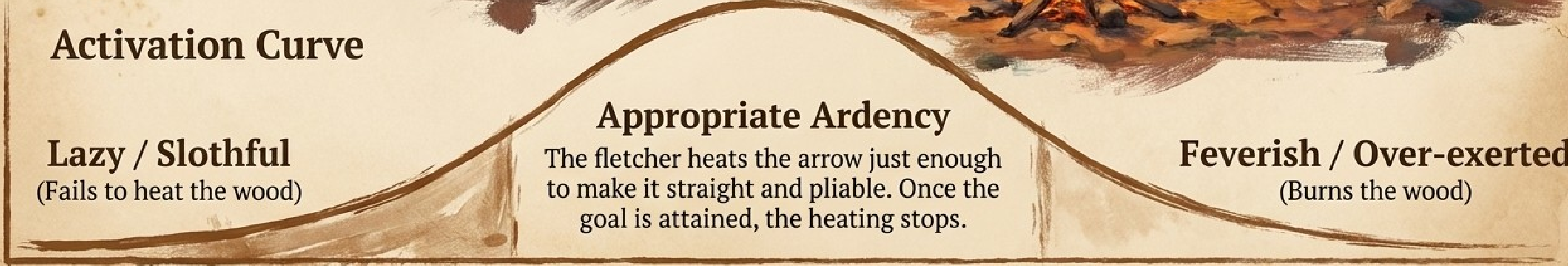
Developing: Actively fostering the factors for Awakening.

The Crucible of Tuned Effort

True skillful effort rejects both doctrinaire extremes: constant exertion to the point of exhaustion, and a knee-jerk fear of “efforting.”

The middle way requires tuning one’s effort precisely to one’s abilities and the task at hand.





Activation Curve

Lazy / Slothful
(Fails to heat the wood)

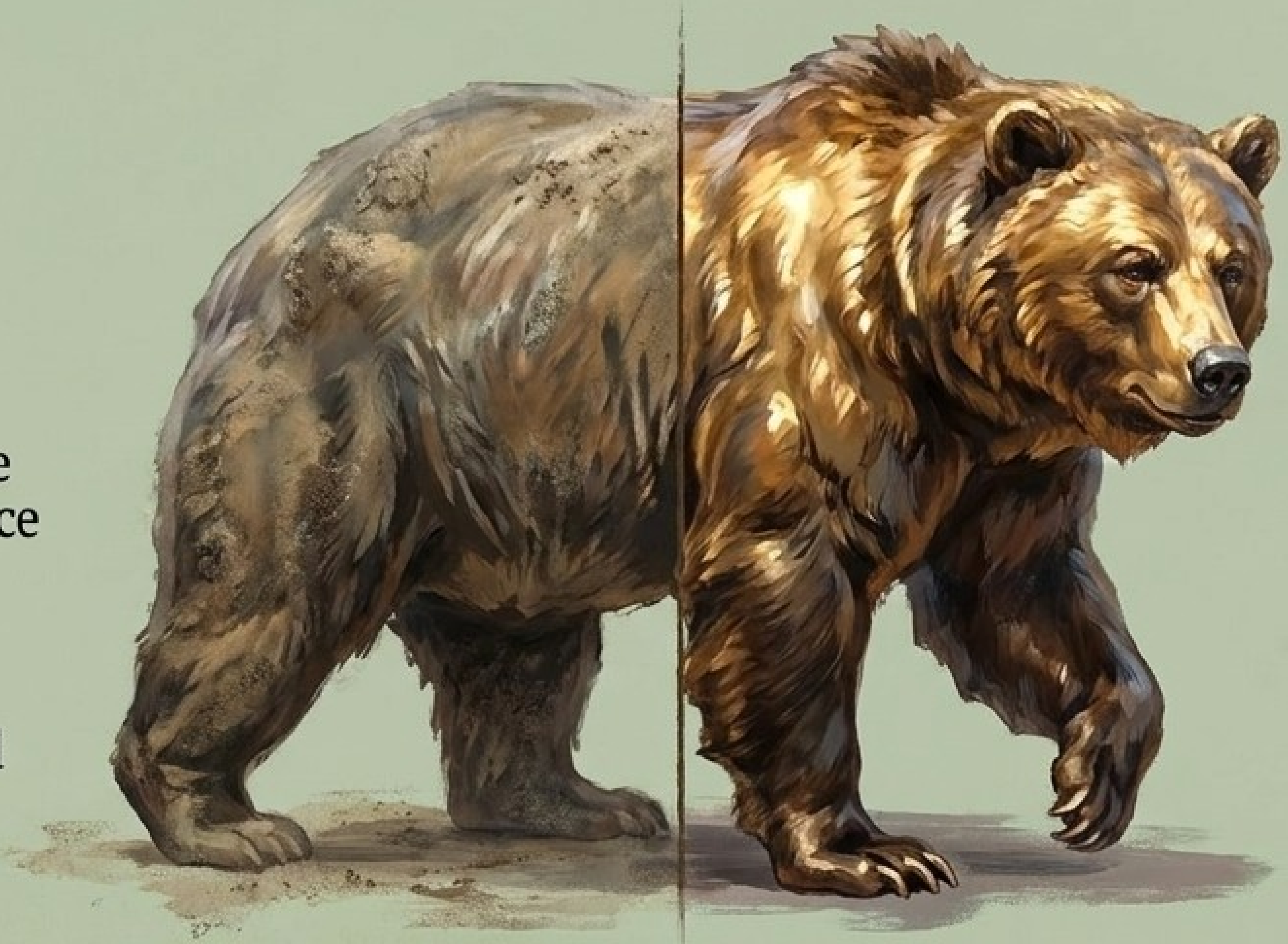
Appropriate Ardency
The fletcher heats the arrow just enough to make it straight and pliable. Once the goal is attained, the heating stops.

Feverish / Over-exerted
(Burns the wood)

The Blemish of the Unaware Mind

Right exertion requires the discernment to recognize one's own internal blemishes—specifically, the act of consorting with evil, unskillful wishes.

- **State:** The individual who has an internal blemish but does not discern it.
- **Action:** They generate no desire or persistence to abandon it.
- **Outcome:** Dies with passion, aversion, and delusion. Blemished, with a mind defiled.



- **State:** The individual who has an internal blemish and discerns it as it has come to be.
- **Action:** They generate desire and arouse persistence to clean the blemish.
- **Outcome:** Dies without passion, aversion, and delusion. Unblemished, with a mind undefiled.

The Enablers: Internal Focus and External Support

For a practitioner in training intent on unexcelled security from bondage,
two factors are unmatched in their ability to foster skillful qualities.

Internal (Appropriate Attention)

Nothing else does so much internally. The monk who attends appropriately inherently abandons what is unskillful and develops what is skillful.

External (Admirable Friendship)

Nothing else does so much externally. The monk who associates with admirable people, doing what wise friends advise, attains step-by-step the ending of all fetters.

The Stages of Refinement

As practice deepens, the function of right exertion becomes increasingly fine-tuned, moving from raw effort toward the stillness of non-fashioning.

Stage 1: Anchoring

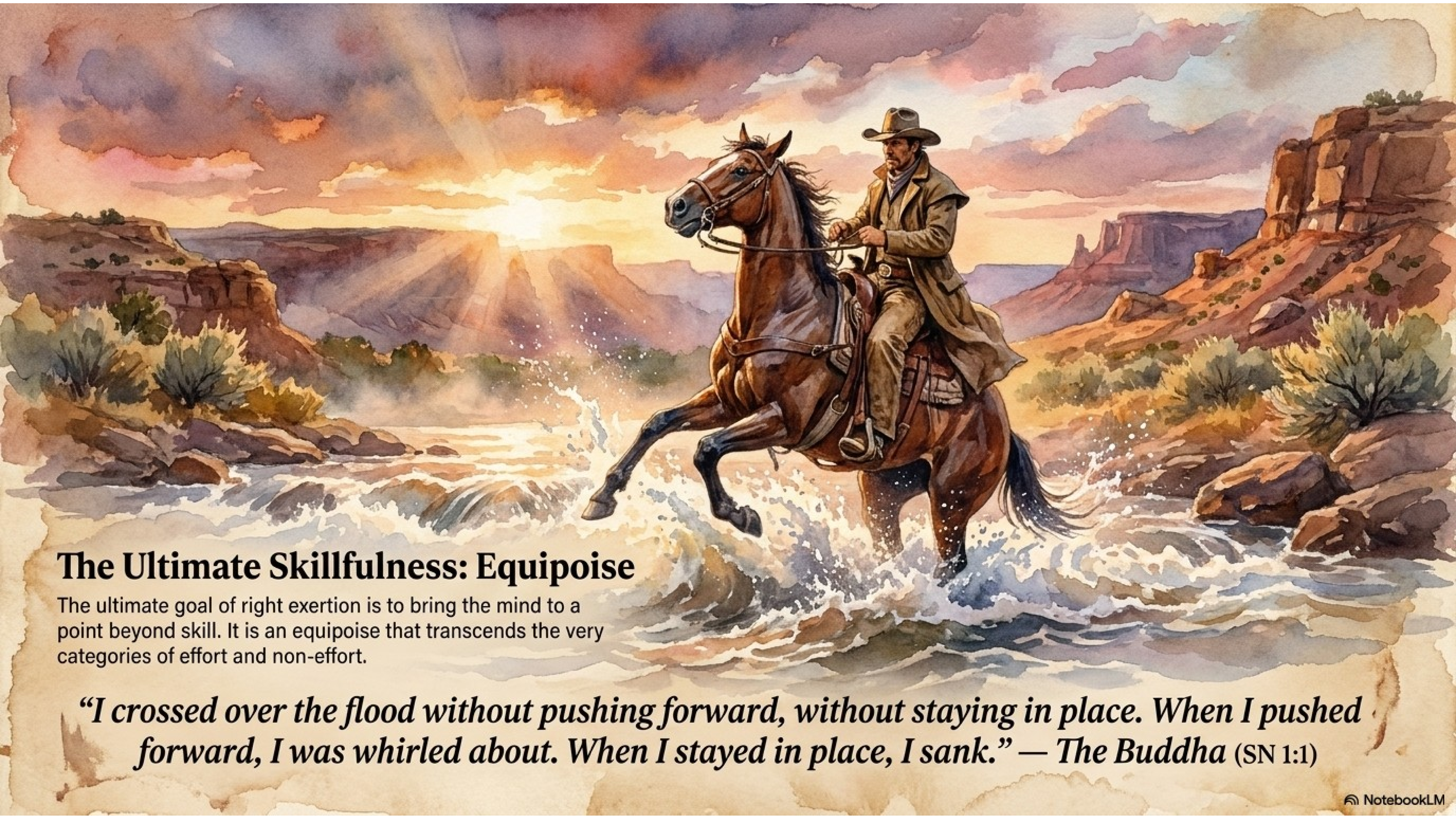
Right exertion functions by keeping the mind fixed on its frame of reference, actively warding off unskillful qualities that would cause it to wander.

Stage 2: Observing Origination

Exertion becomes refined. The practitioner stops getting involved with “what” is arising and passing away, steering the mind to observe the mechanical process to attain the stillness of *jhana*.

Stage 3: Phenomenological Awareness

Exertion maintains a radically “empty” awareness of the frame of reference, bringing the mind to a state of non-fashioning appropriate for Awakening.



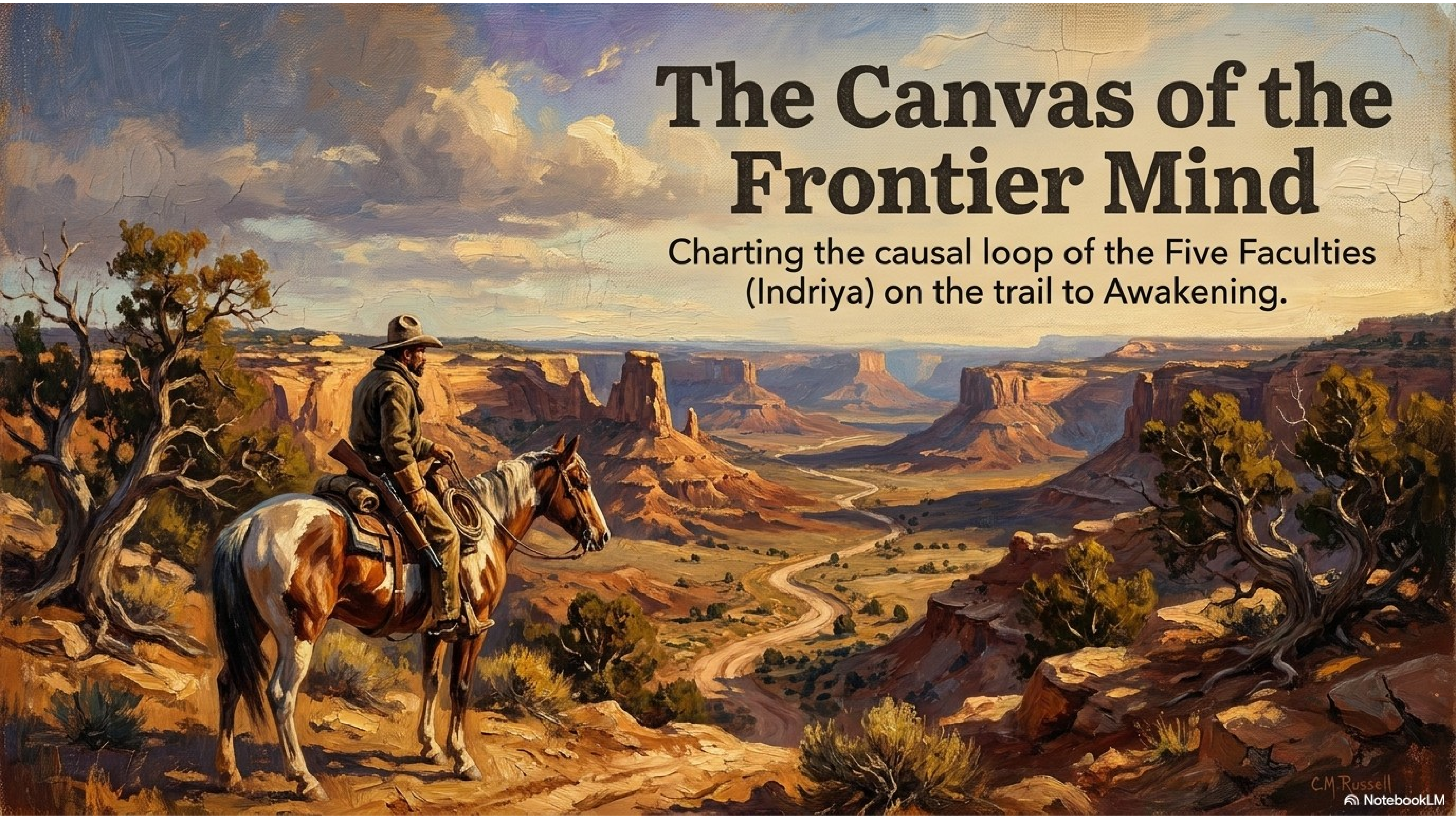
The Ultimate Skillfulness: Equipoise

The ultimate goal of right exertion is to bring the mind to a point beyond skill. It is an equipoise that transcends the very categories of effort and non-effort.

> *“I crossed over the flood without pushing forward, without staying in place. When I pushed forward, I was whirled about. When I stayed in place, I sank.” — The Buddha* (SN 1:1)

The Canvas of the Frontier Mind

Charting the causal loop of the Five Faculties (Indriya) on the trail to Awakening.

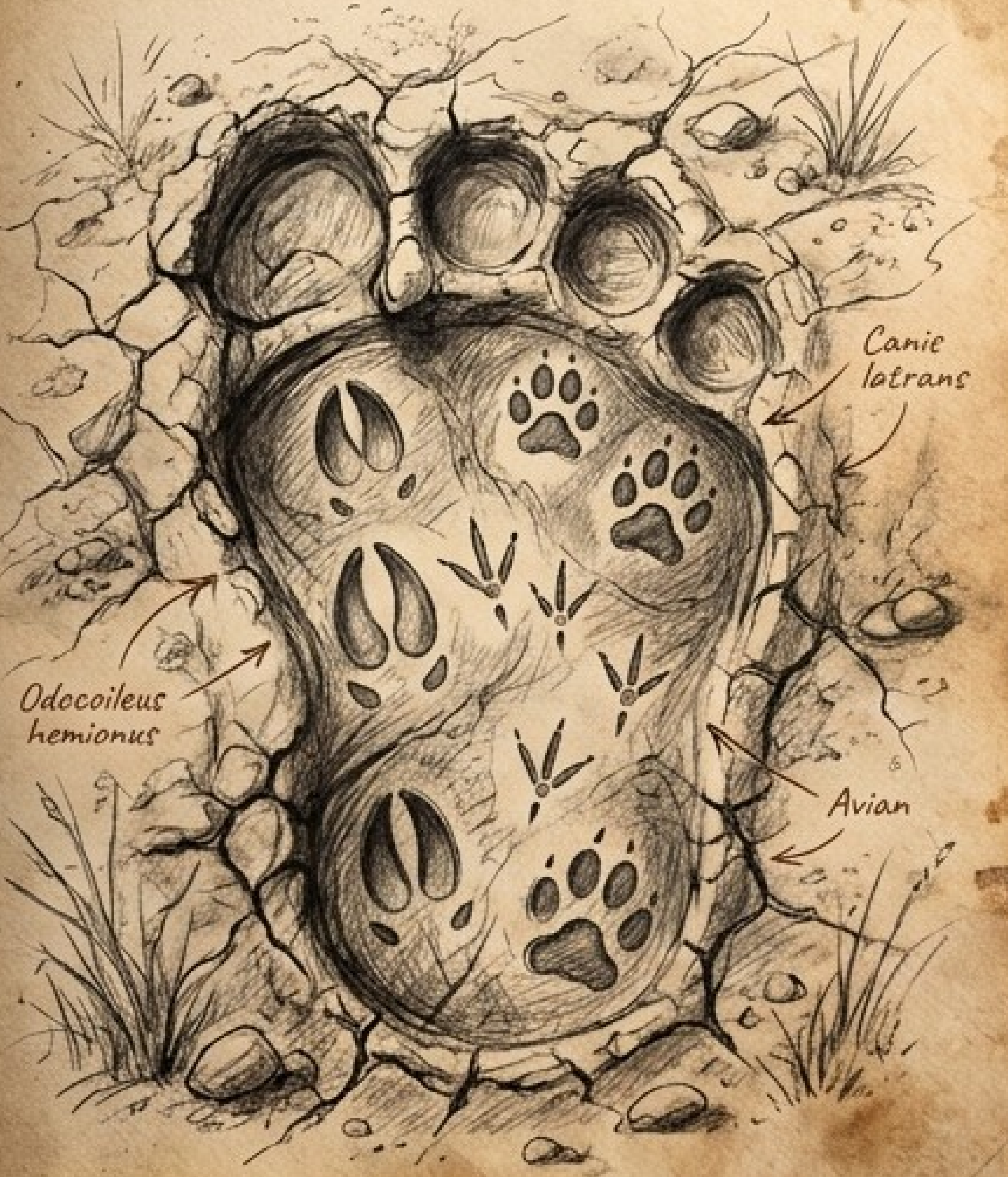


Heedfulness is the Engine of the Journey

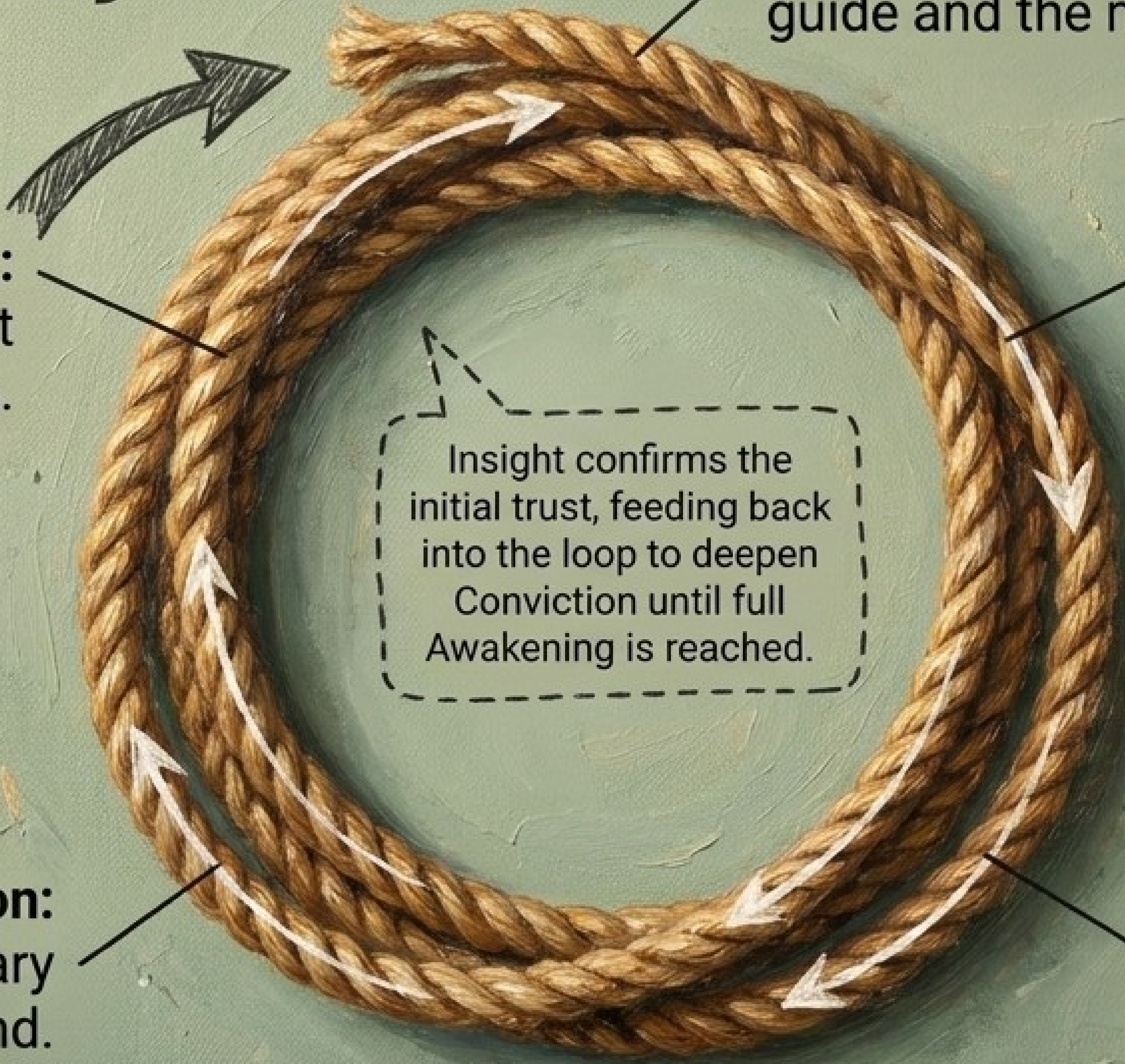
The Ultimate Footprint: Just as all animal tracks fit within the elephant's footprint, all skillful qualities are rooted in heedfulness.

Urgency & Precision: Heedfulness realizes the dangers inherent in each careless act of the mind, fostering a deep sense of urgency.

The Razor's Edge: True heedfulness is acting as if one might only live for the interval it takes to "breathe out after breathing in."



The Cycle of the Five Faculties Faculties (Indriya)



1. Conviction: Trusting the guide and the map.

2. Persistence: The energy applied to the trail.

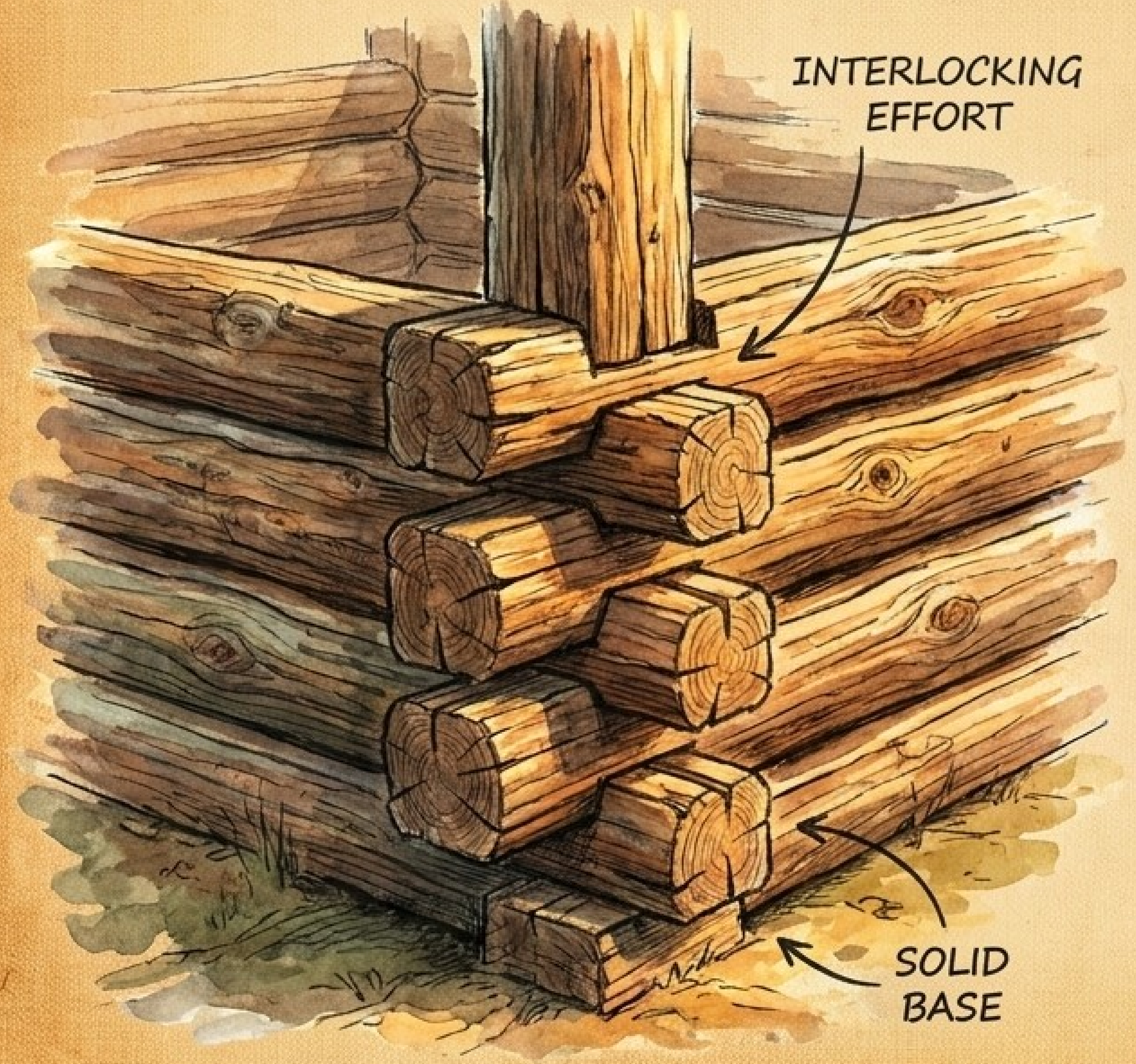
3. Mindfulness: The meticulous memory of the terrain.

4. Concentration: The unified sanctuary of the mind.

5. Discernment: Penetrating insight that confirms the map.

Insight confirms the initial trust, feeding back into the loop to deepen Conviction until full Awakening is reached.

Conviction is an Active Foundation

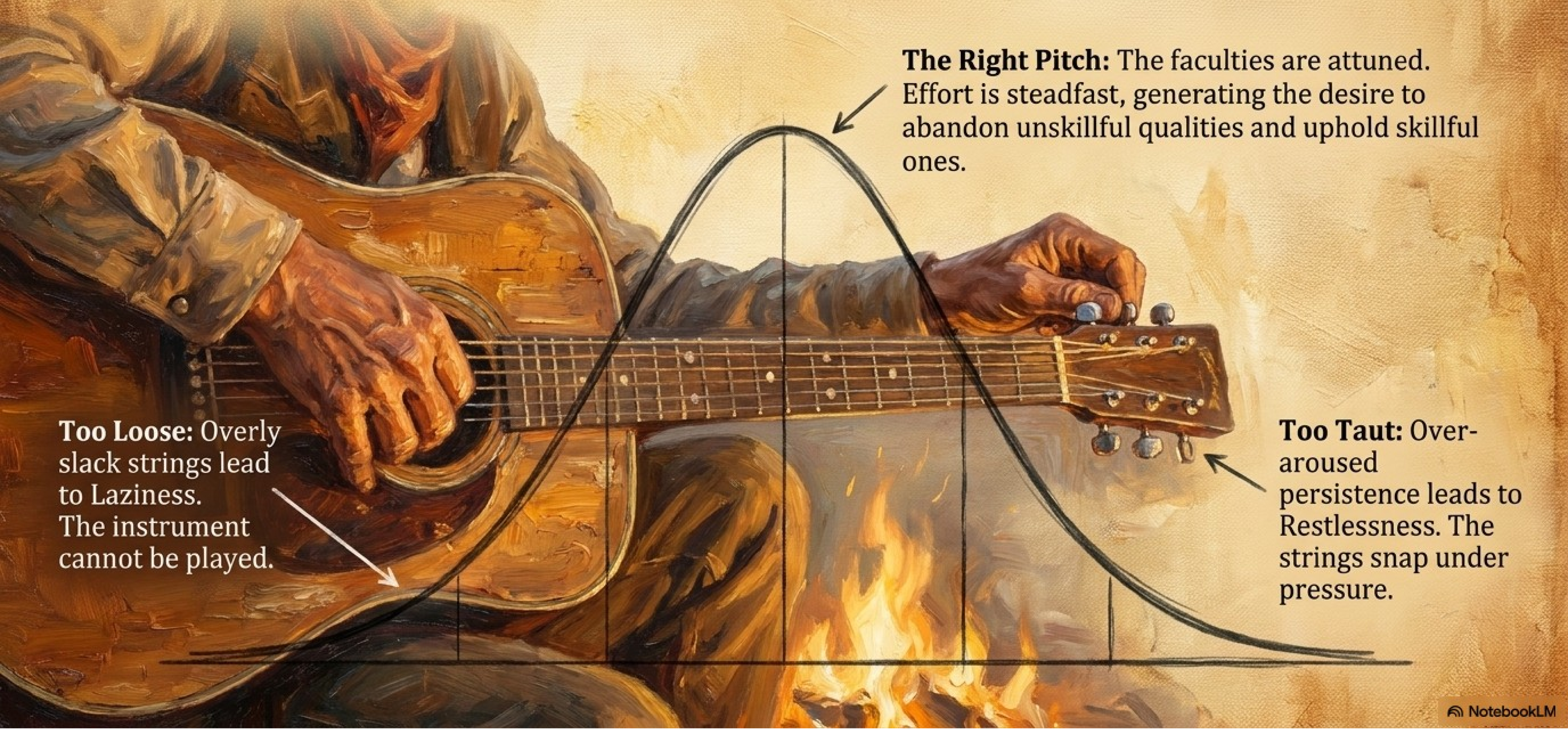


Trusting the Guide: Verified confidence that the Awakened One is an unexcelled trainer for those fit to be tamed.

Believing the Map: Confidence that the laws of kamma (cause and effect) shape our experience and can be mastered.

Taking Responsibility: Unlike systems relying on divine grace, this conviction inherently requires action. One is entangled in a web that only one's own skillful effort can unravel.

Persistence Demands the Perfect Pitch

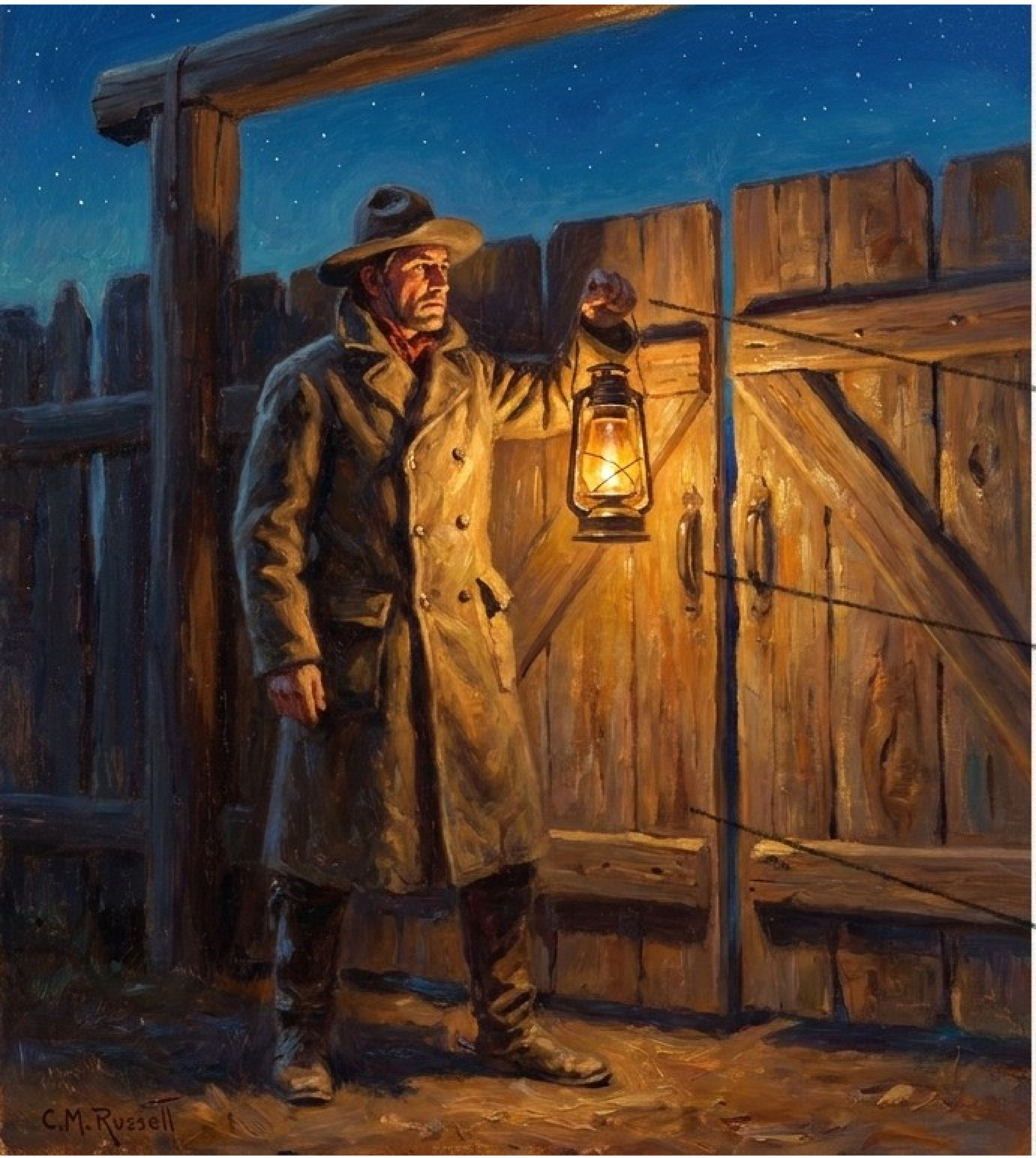


The Right Pitch: The faculties are attuned. Effort is steadfast, generating the desire to abandon unskillful qualities and uphold skillful ones.

Too Loose: Overly slack strings lead to Laziness. The instrument cannot be played.

Too Taut: Over-aroused persistence leads to Restlessness. The strings snap under pressure.

Mindfulness is the Unfailing Gatekeeper



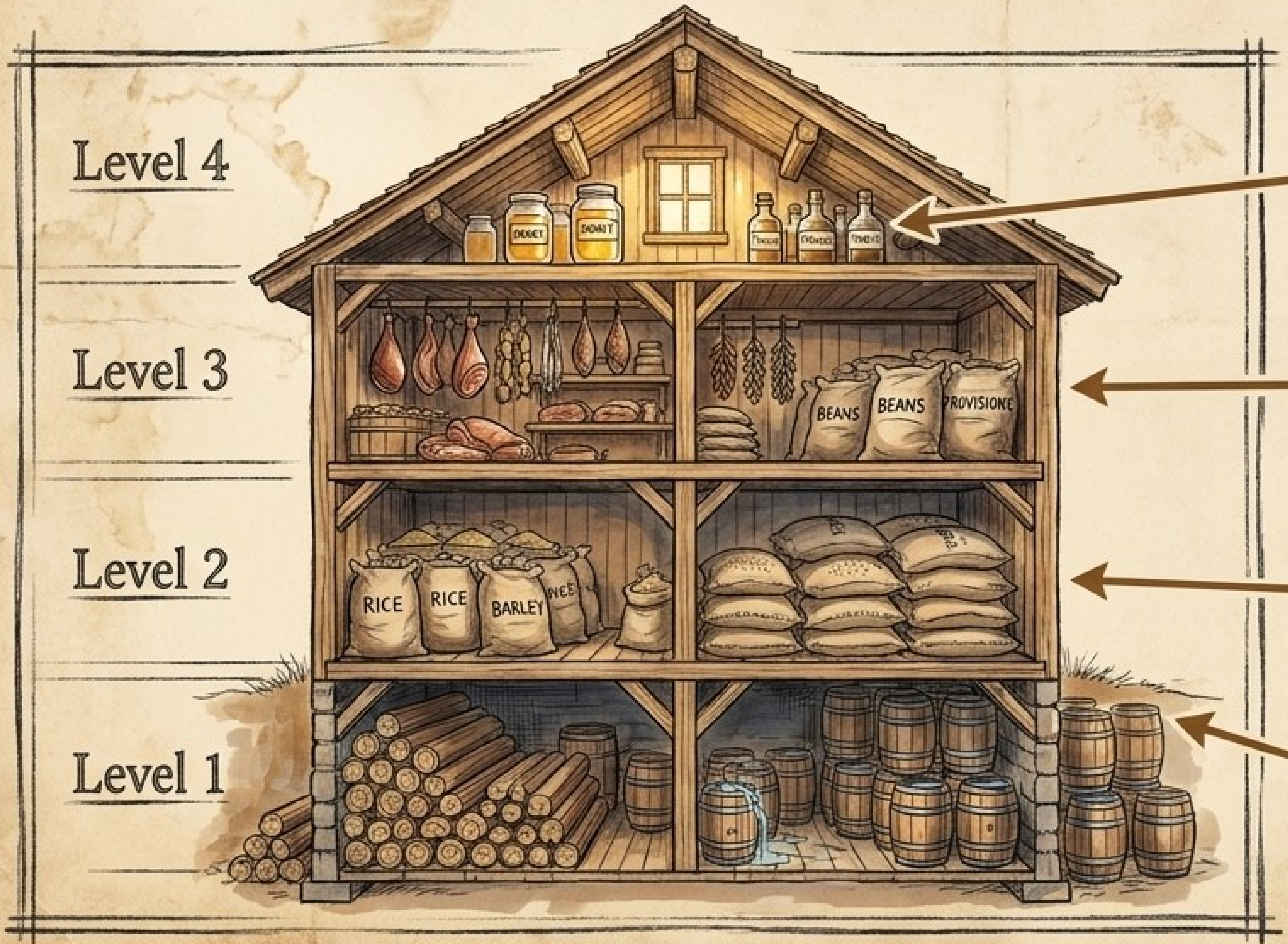
Meticulous Memory: Able to call to mind even things done and said long ago.

Selective Entry: Keeps out the unknown (unskillful qualities) and lets in the known (skillful qualities).

The Four Frames: Remains ardently focused on the body, feelings, mind, and mental qualities—putting aside greed and distress with reference to the world.

Concentration Secures the Inner Sanctuary

Core Goal: Making it the object to let go, attaining singleness of mind.


Level 4
Level 3
Level 2
Level 1
BEANS
BEANS
PROVISIONS
RICE
RICE
BARLEY

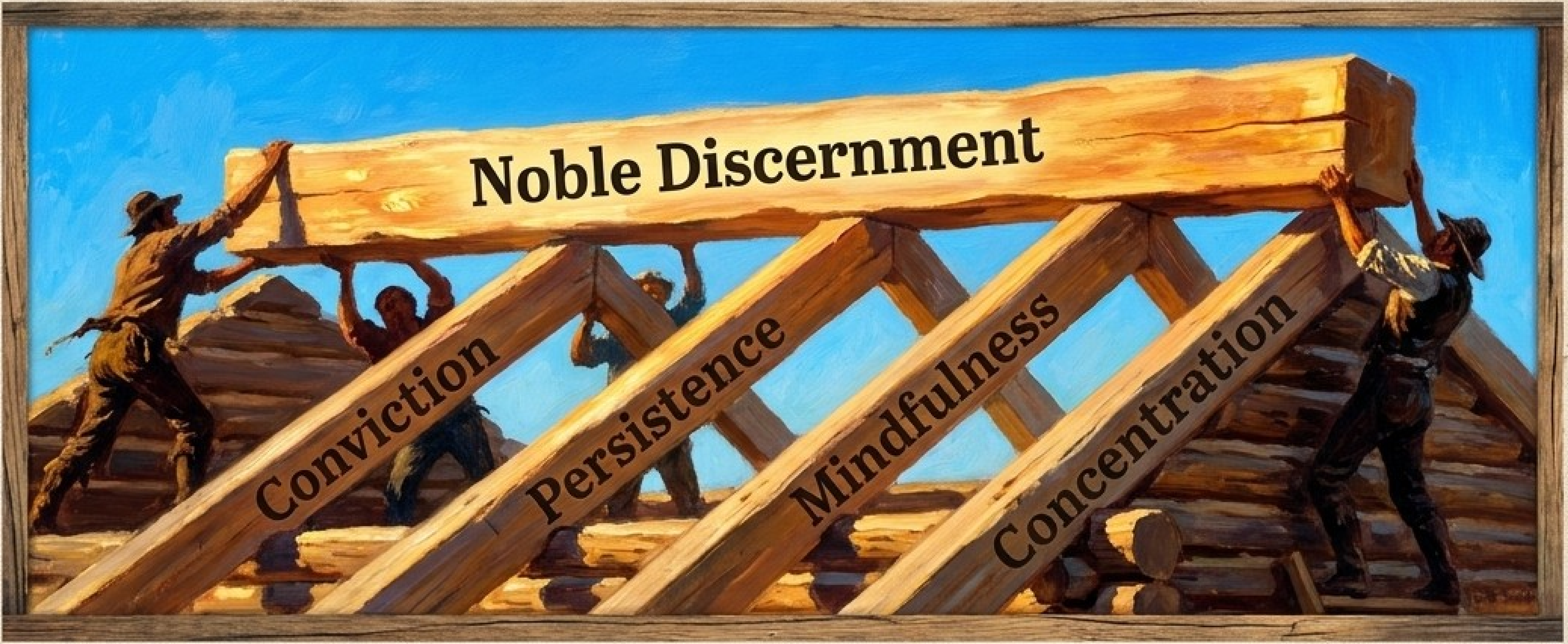
Level 4: Purity of equanimity, neither pleasure nor pain (Refined Tonics & Honey).

Level 3: Equanimous, mindful, and sensing pleasure with the body (Beans & Provisions).

Level 2: Unification of awareness free from directed thought (Rice & Barley).

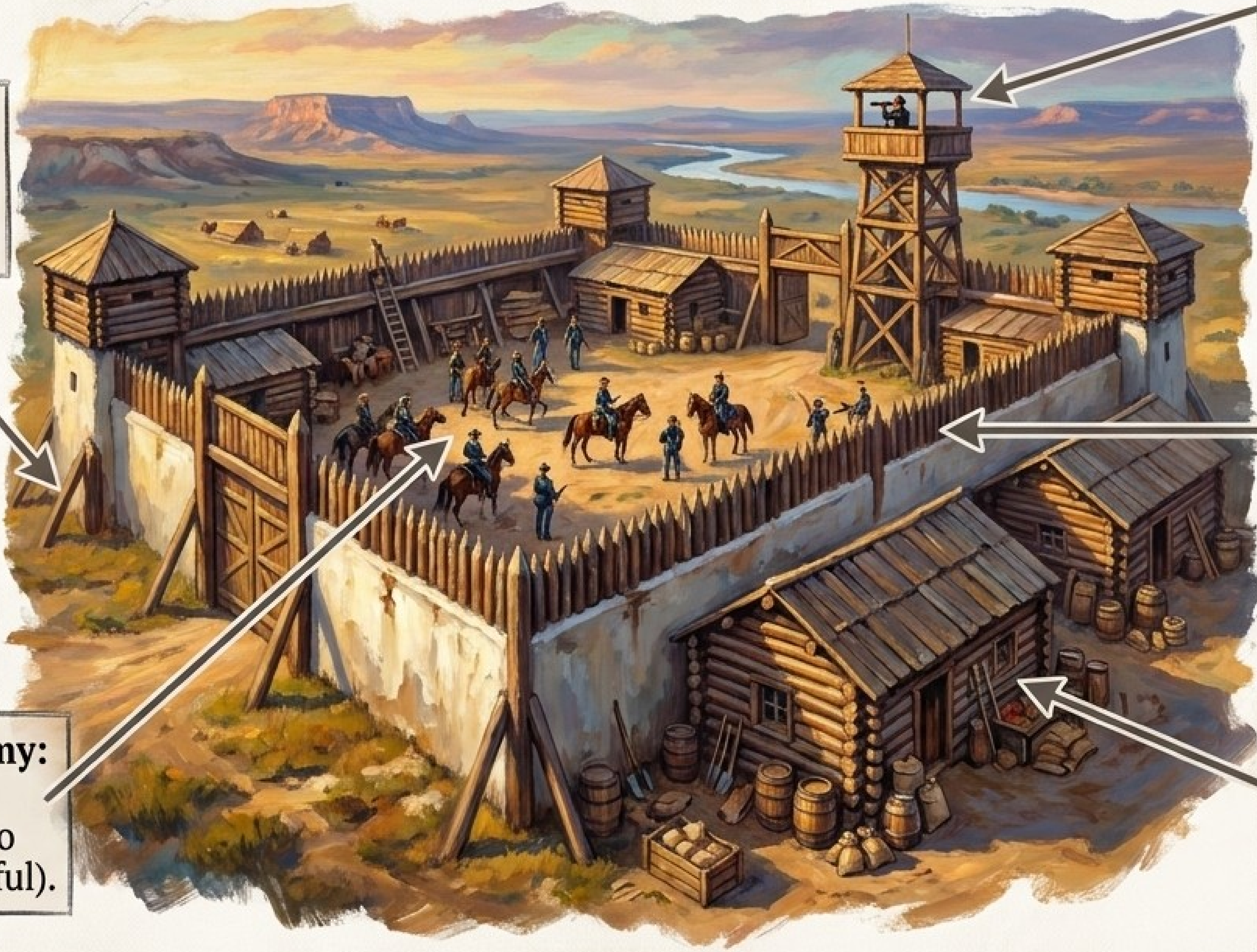
Level 1: Rapture and pleasure born of seclusion (Timber & Water).

Discernment is the Structural Ridge Beam


Noble Discernment
Conviction
Persistence
Mindfulness
Concentration

The Mechanism: As long as the ridge beam is absent, the rafters are unstable. When discernment of the Four Noble Truths arises, all other faculties stand solid. Discernment is the chief of all wings to self-awakening.

Anatomy of the Awakened Outpost



Foundation Post:
Conviction
(Deeply rooted,
unshakable).

The Gatekeeper:
Mindfulness
(Highly meticulous,
guarding
the entrance).

Thick Plastered Ramparts:
Discernment
(Noble, penetrating,
warding off without).

The Cavalry & Army:
Persistence
(Steadfast effort to
abandon the unskillful).

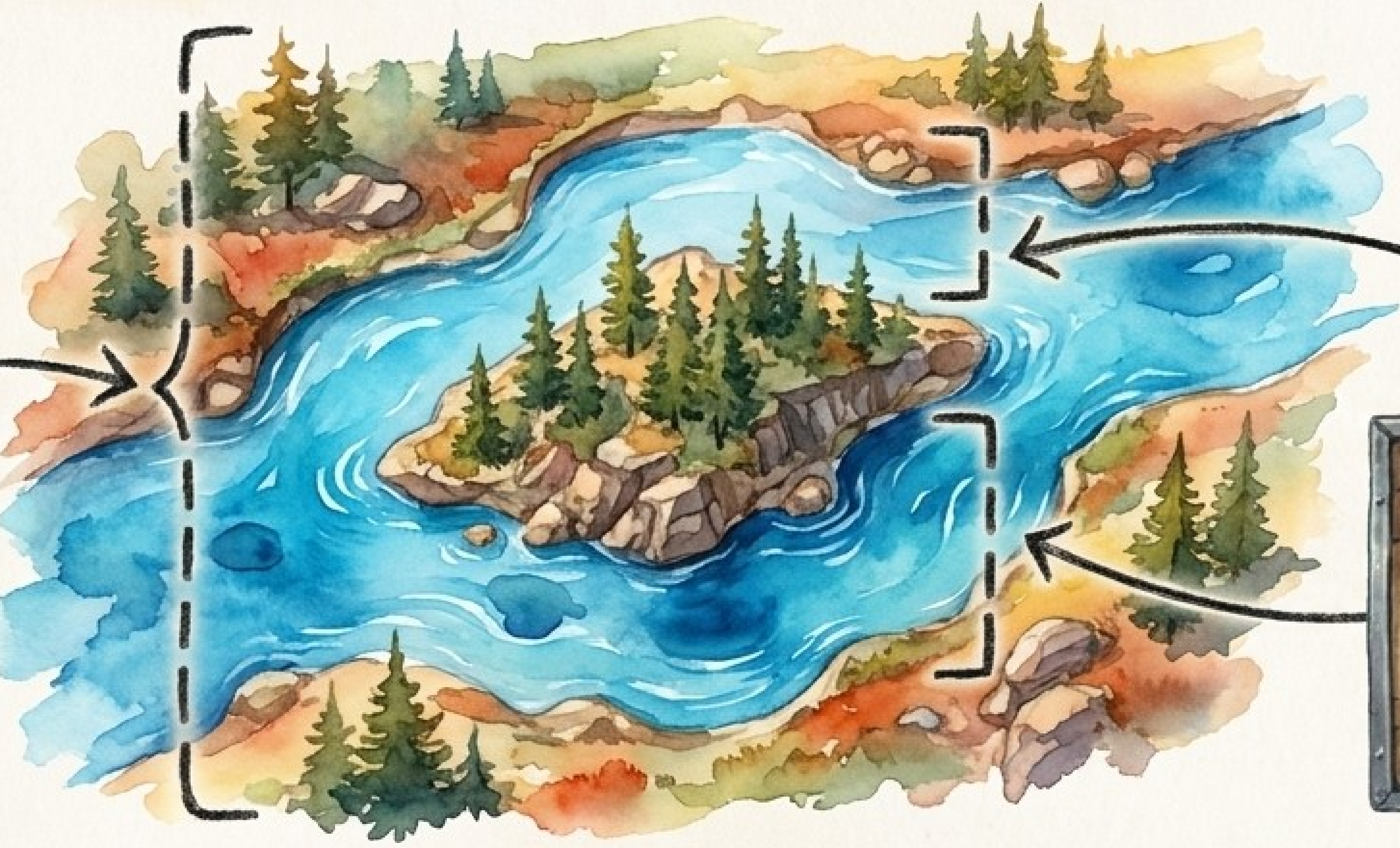
The Storehouses:
Concentration
(The four jhanas
providing comfort
and sustenance for
those within).

The Four Modalities of the Trail

	Slow Intuition	Quick Intuition
Painful Practice	Struggle against deep defilements with weak faculties. Attains immediacy slowly.	Struggle against deep defilements but armed with acute faculties. Attains immediacy quickly.
Pleasant Practice	Accesses deep concentration easily, but weak faculties slow final intuition.	The optimal path—accesses concentration easily and possesses acute faculties for rapid attainment.

One Current, Two Ways of Reckoning

Are the Five Faculties and the Five Strengths different?



Method 1 (The Single Current): Looking at all water east and west of the island. The river is one entity sloping toward Unbinding.

Method 2 (The Dual Current): Looking at the water north of the island (Faculties) and south of the island (Strengths).

Conclusion: They are identical in essence. Whatever is the faculty of conviction is the strength of conviction. The difference lies only in the manner of reckoning the flow of the mind toward the goal.

Knowing the Path, But Not Holding to It

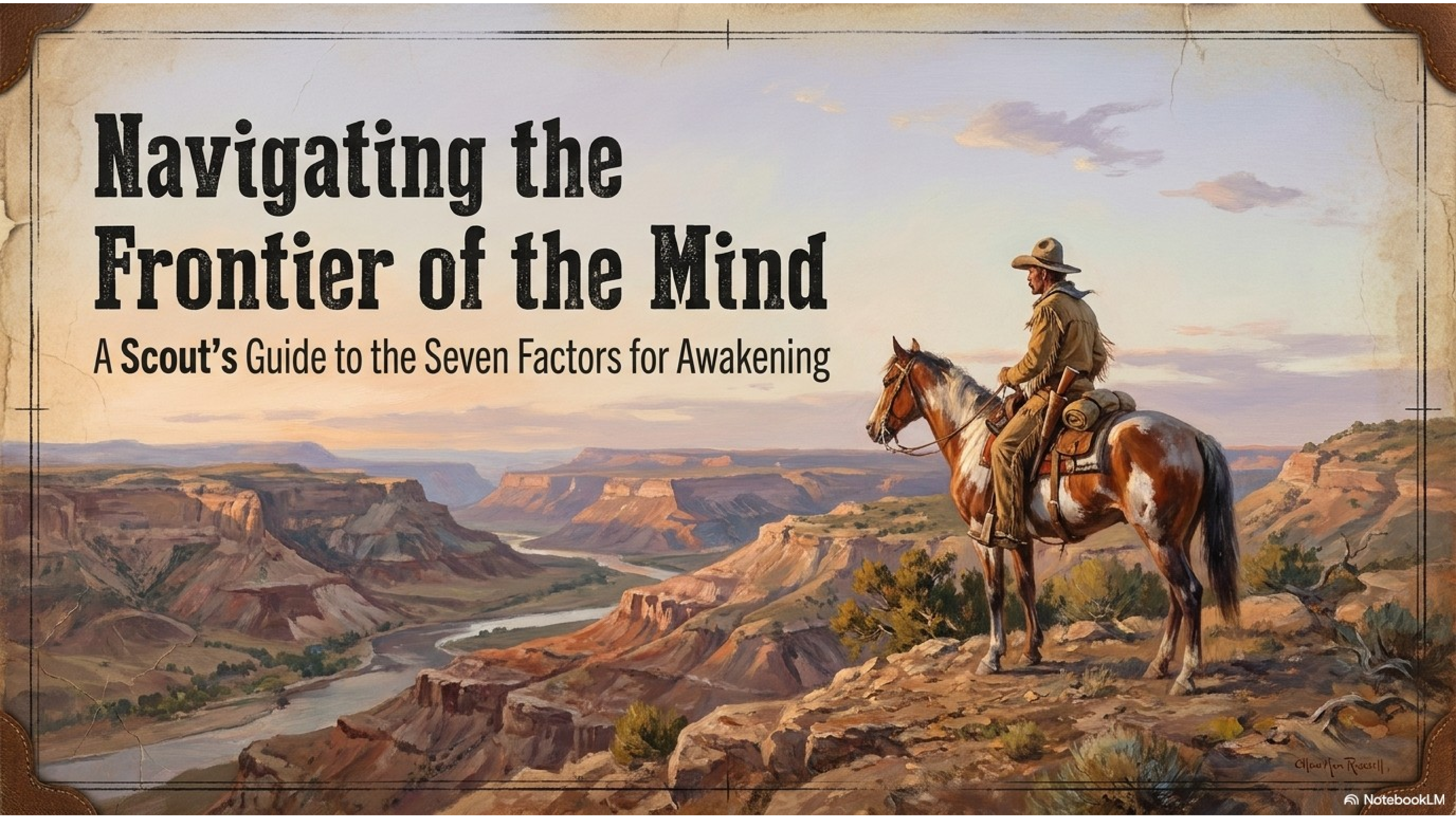
Discerning the Escape: Mastery is not complete until one discerns the escape from the faculties themselves. They are means to the Deathless, not ends in themselves.

The Culmination: Through regarding views in terms of their effect on the mind, the awakened person discerns what lies beyond views.

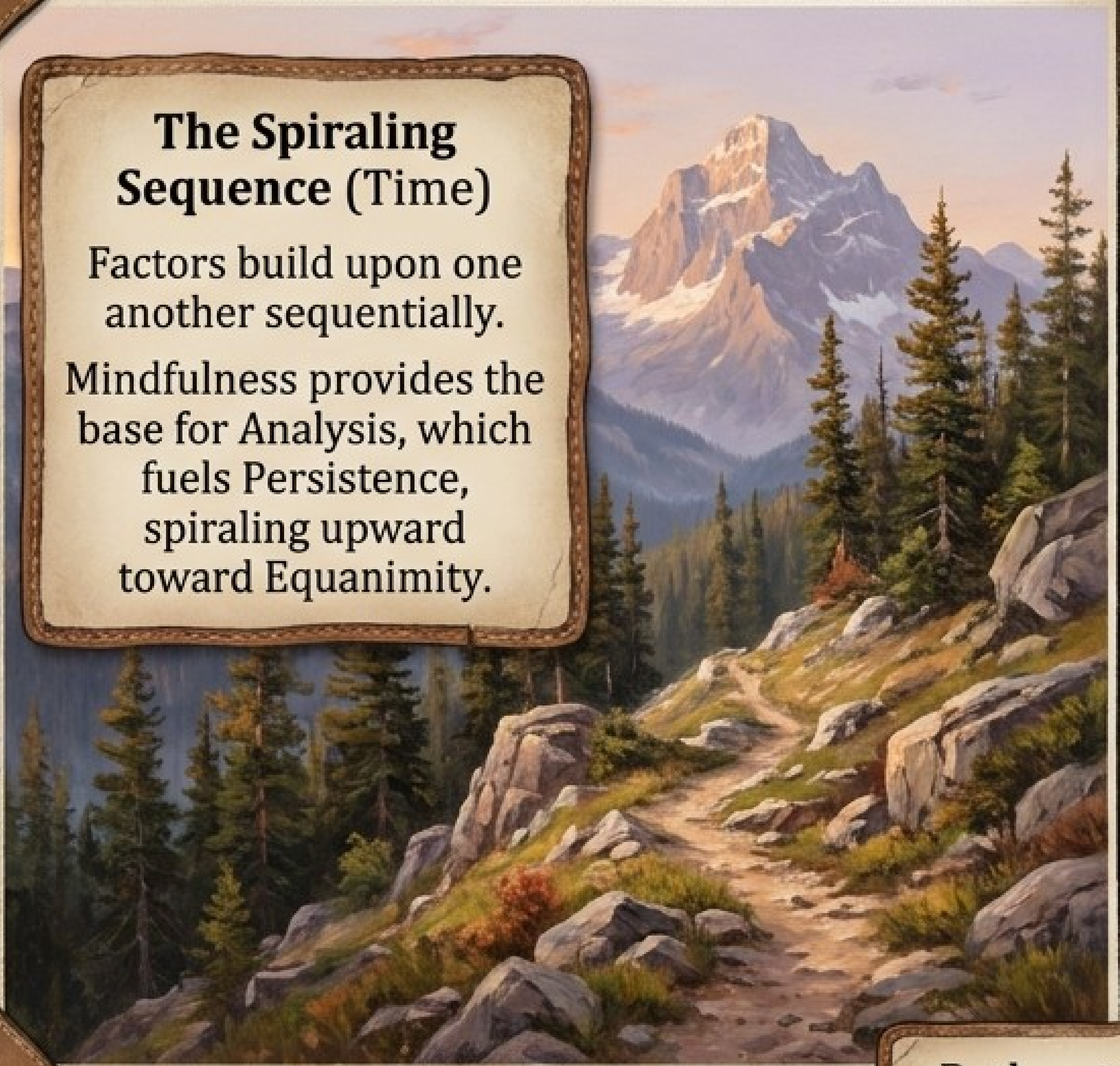
Unbinding: As a result of 'knowing but not holding,' the mind experiences Unbinding in the here and now—fully released from the need for sustenance or clinging.

Navigating the Frontier of the Mind

A **Scout's** Guide to the Seven Factors for Awakening



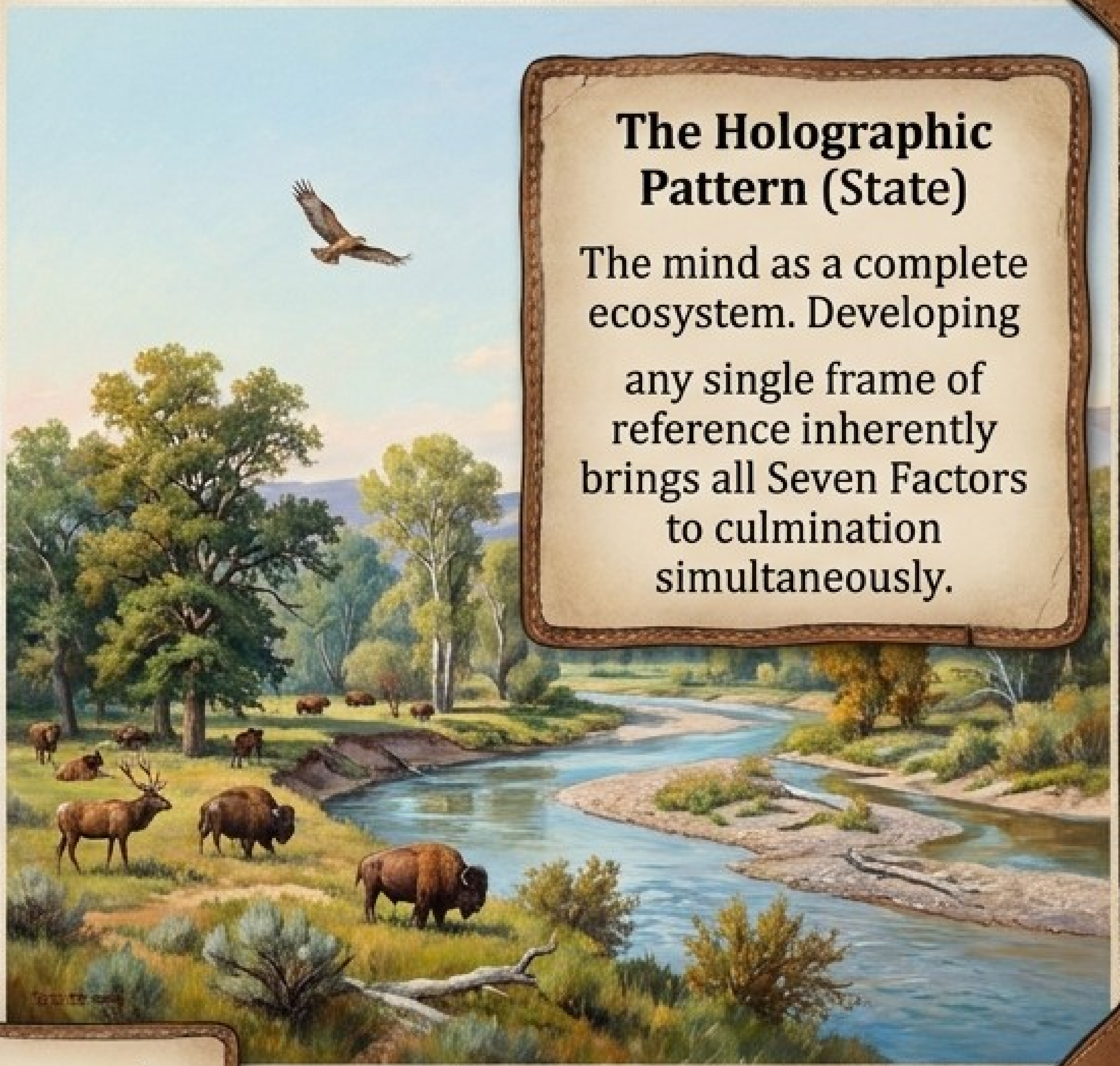
Two Paths Through the Wilderness



The Spiraling Sequence (Time)

Factors build upon one another sequentially.

Mindfulness provides the base for Analysis, which fuels Persistence, spiraling upward toward Equanimity.



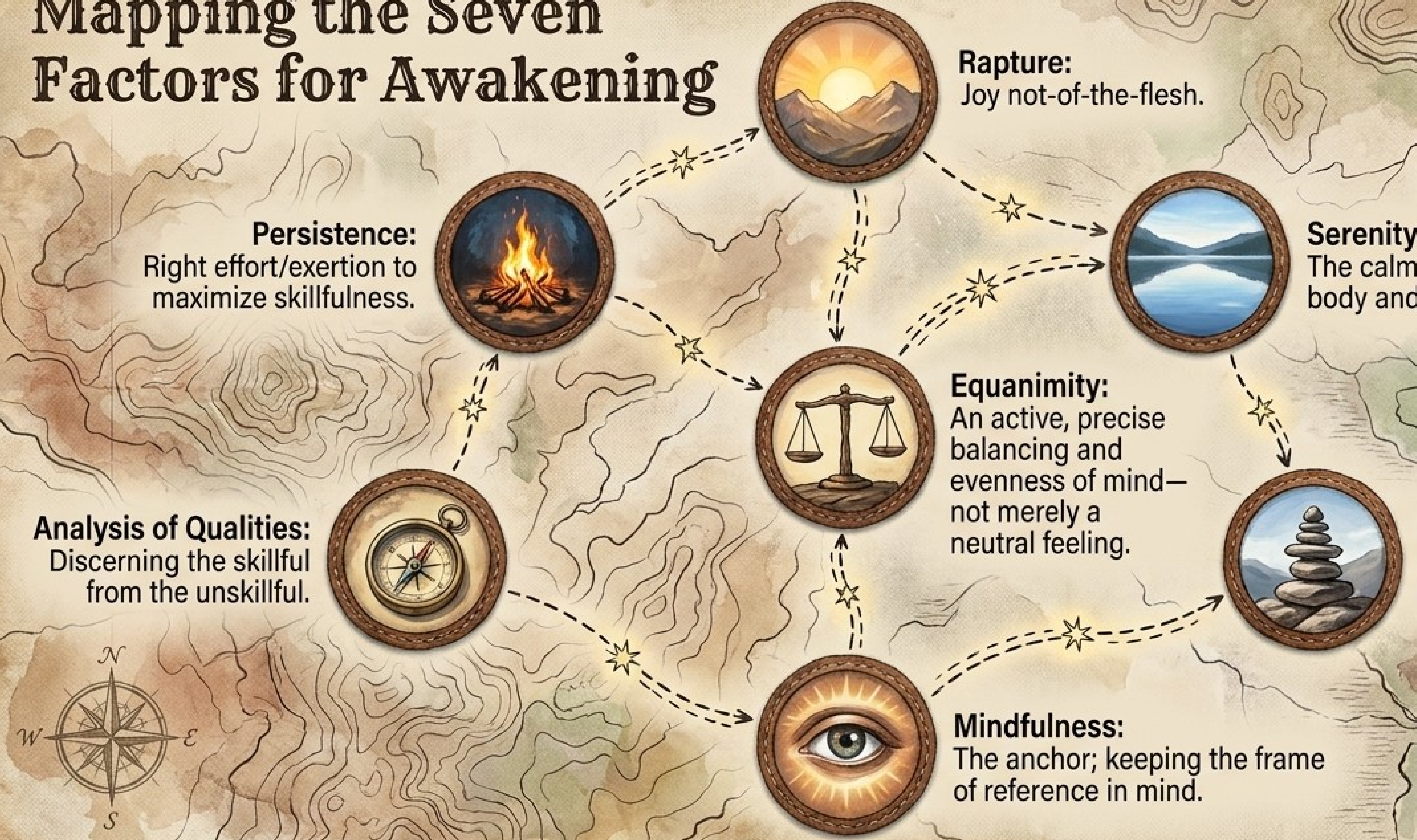
The Holographic Pattern (State)

The mind as a complete ecosystem. Developing

any single frame of reference inherently brings all Seven Factors to culmination simultaneously.

Both patterns operate together in practice.

Mapping the Seven Factors for Awakening



Rapture:
Joy not-of-the-flesh.

Persistence:
Right effort/exertion to maximize skillfulness.

Serenity:
The calming of body and mind.

Equanimity:
An active, precise balancing and evenness of mind—not merely a neutral feeling.

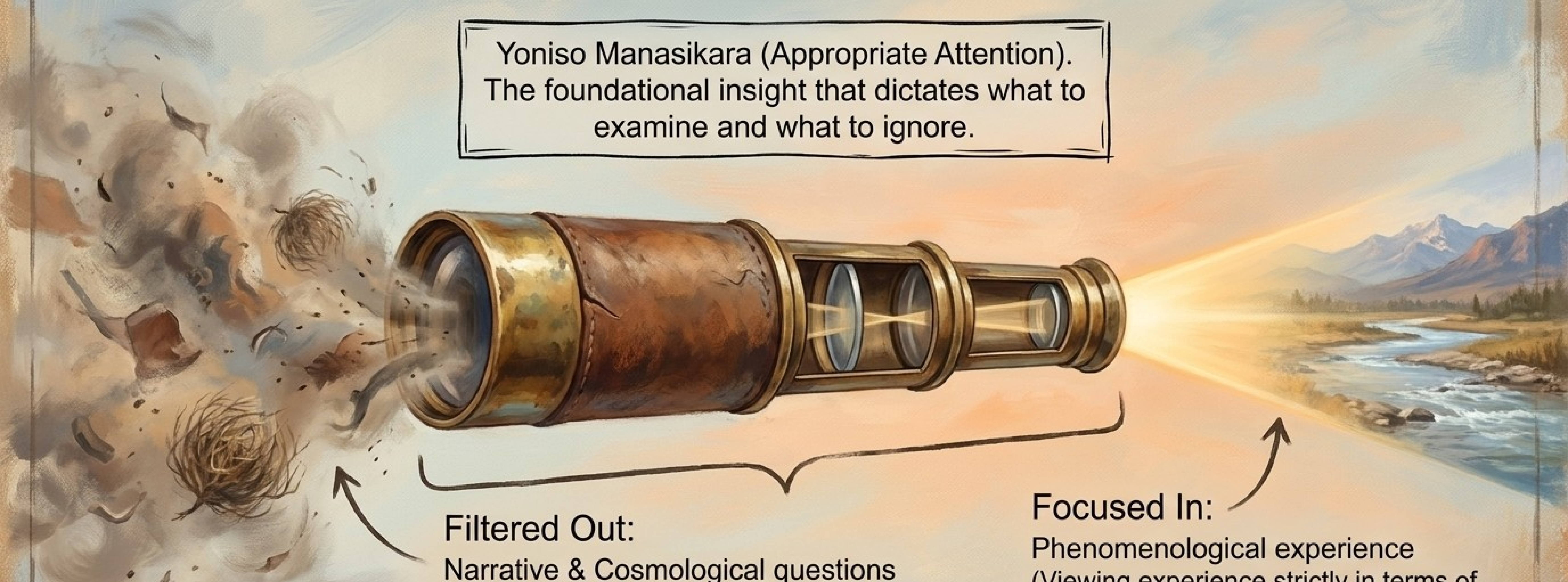
Analysis of Qualities:
Discerning the skillful from the unskillful.

Concentration:
The centering of awareness.

Mindfulness:
The anchor; keeping the frame of reference in mind.

The Scout's Spyglass: Appropriate Attention

Yoniso Manasikara (Appropriate Attention). The foundational insight that dictates what to examine and what to ignore.



Filtered Out:

Narrative & Cosmological questions
(Leads to the proliferation of mental effluents and stress).

Focused In:

Phenomenological experience
(Viewing experience strictly in terms of cause and effect to weaken effluents).

Reading the Trail Signs: What to Ask

The Dead End
(Put Aside)

- Do I exist?
- Is there a self?
- What will I be in the future?

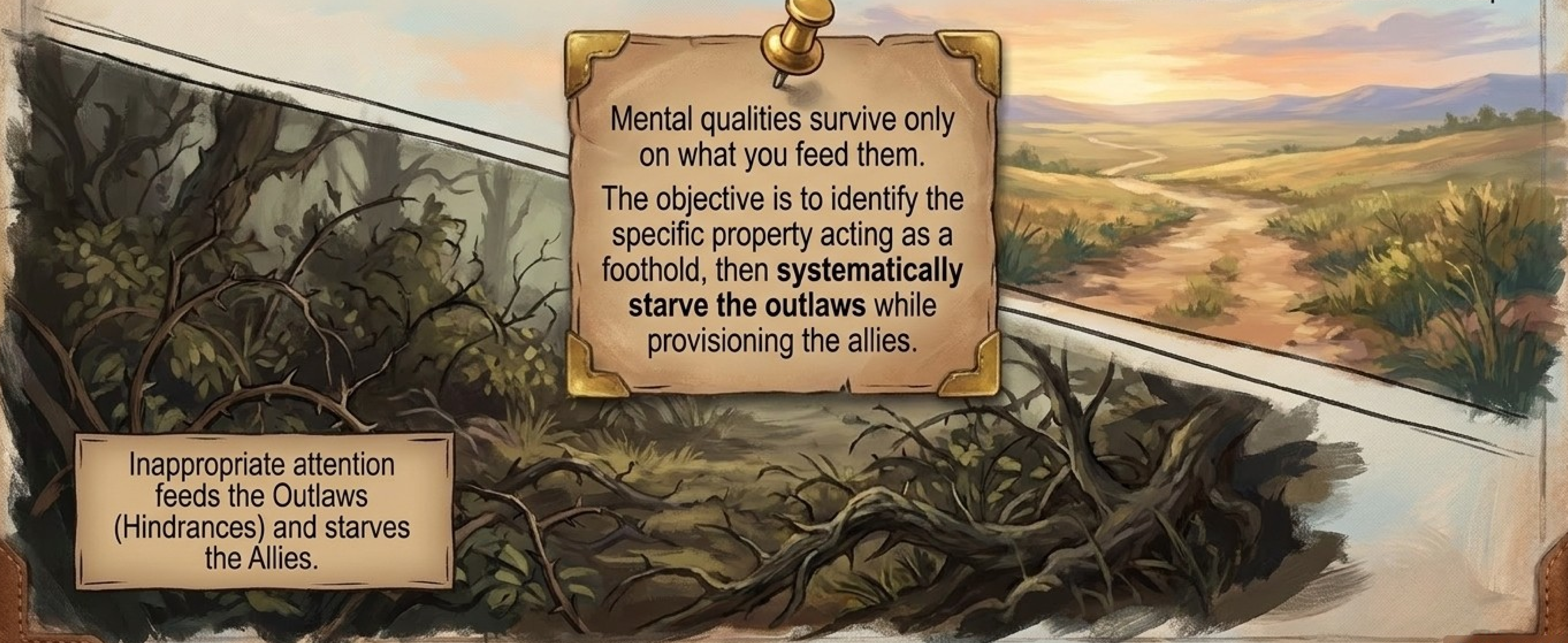
Result: Excites uncertainty, pulls the mind into narratives, and creates attachment. The Buddha refused to answer these.

The True Trail
(Categorical Inquiry)

- Is this mine?
- Is this me?
- If regarded as me/mine, will there be suffering?

Result: Correctly answered (No, No, Yes), these abandon craving, shifting the mind directly into the phenomenological mode.

Tending the Landscape: Feeding and Starving



Appropriate attention feeds the **Awakening Factors** and starves the **Hindrances**.

Mental qualities survive only on what you feed them.

The objective is to identify the specific property acting as a foothold, then **systematically starve the outlaws** while provisioning the allies.

Inappropriate attention feeds the Outlaws (Hindrances) and starves the Allies.

Starving the Outlaws: The Five Hindrances

Sensual Desire

Fed by: The theme of beauty.

Starved by: Attending to the theme of unattractiveness.

Ill Will

Fed by: The theme of irritation.

Starved by: Awareness-Release (Good will, compassion).

Sloth & Drowsiness

Fed by: Boredom, weariness, sluggishness.

Starved by: Focusing on the potential for effort and exertion.

Restlessness & Anxiety

Fed by: Non-stillness of awareness.

Starved by: The stilling of awareness.

Uncertainty

Fed by: Phenomena that trigger doubt.

Starved by: Analyzing mental qualities as strictly skillful vs. unskillful.

SKILLFUL
UNBKILLPUL

Provisions for the Allies: Feeding the Factors

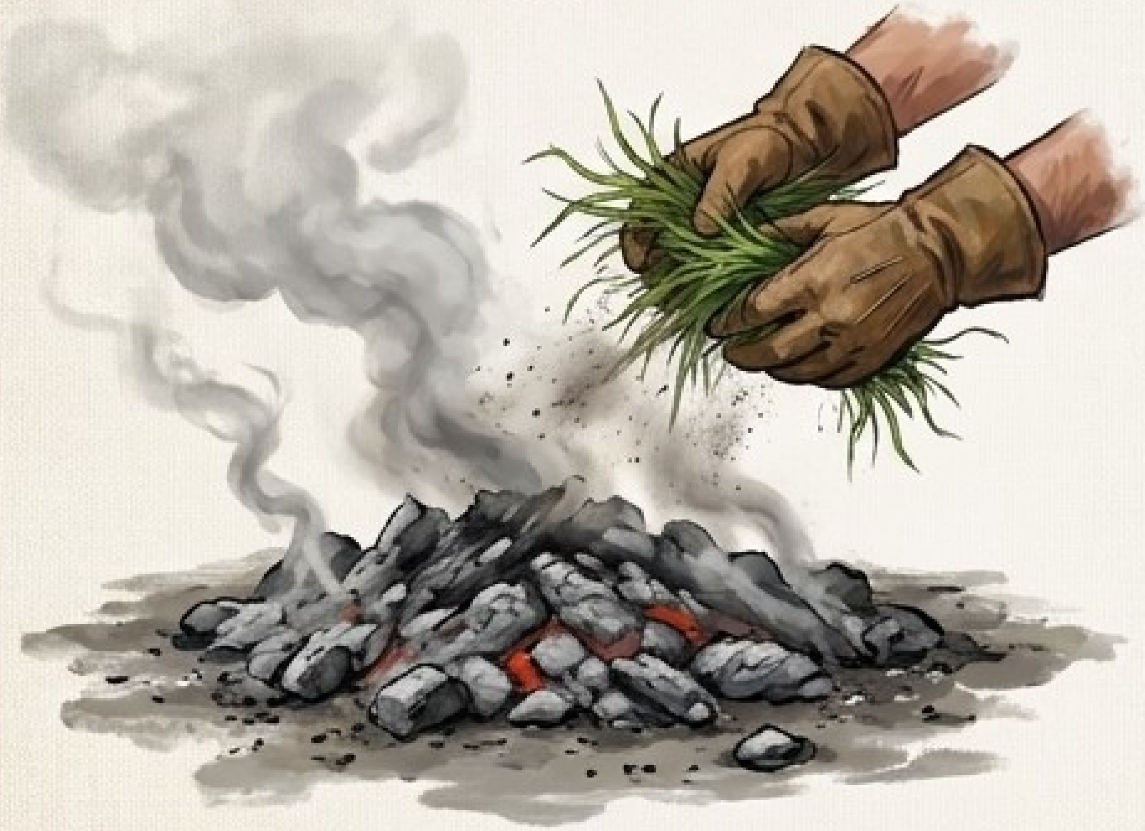
The Factor	The Nourishment (Appropriate Attention to...)
Mindfulness	Well-purified virtue and views made straight.
Analysis of Qualities	The distinction between skillful/unskillful, dark/light qualities.
Persistence	The potential for effort, exertion, and striving.
Serenity	Both physical serenity and mental serenity.
Concentration	Themes for calm and non-distraction (the four frames of reference).

Note: Rapture and Equanimity are fed by their specific internal footholds, challenging the scout to explore cause and effect self-reliantly.

The Physics of the Campfire

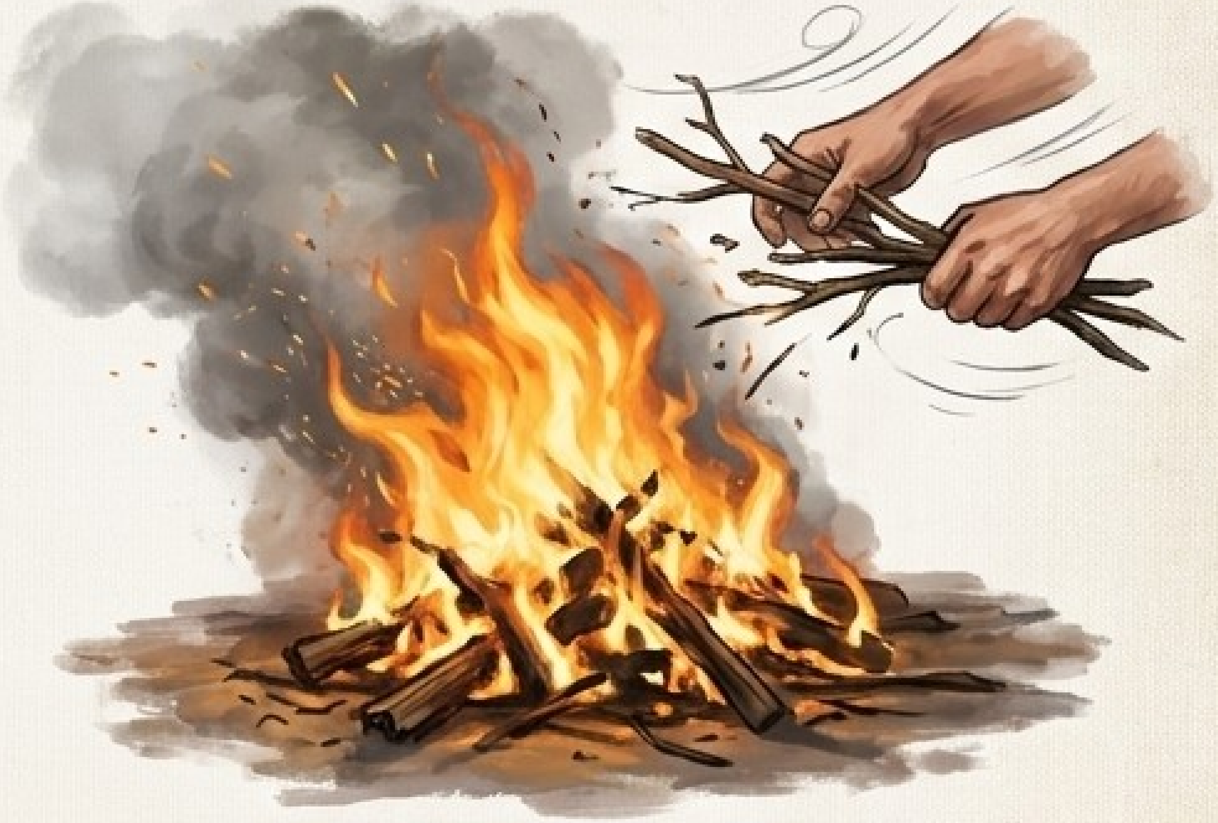
The Insight: You cannot balance the mind with the wrong fuel.

The Sluggish Mind



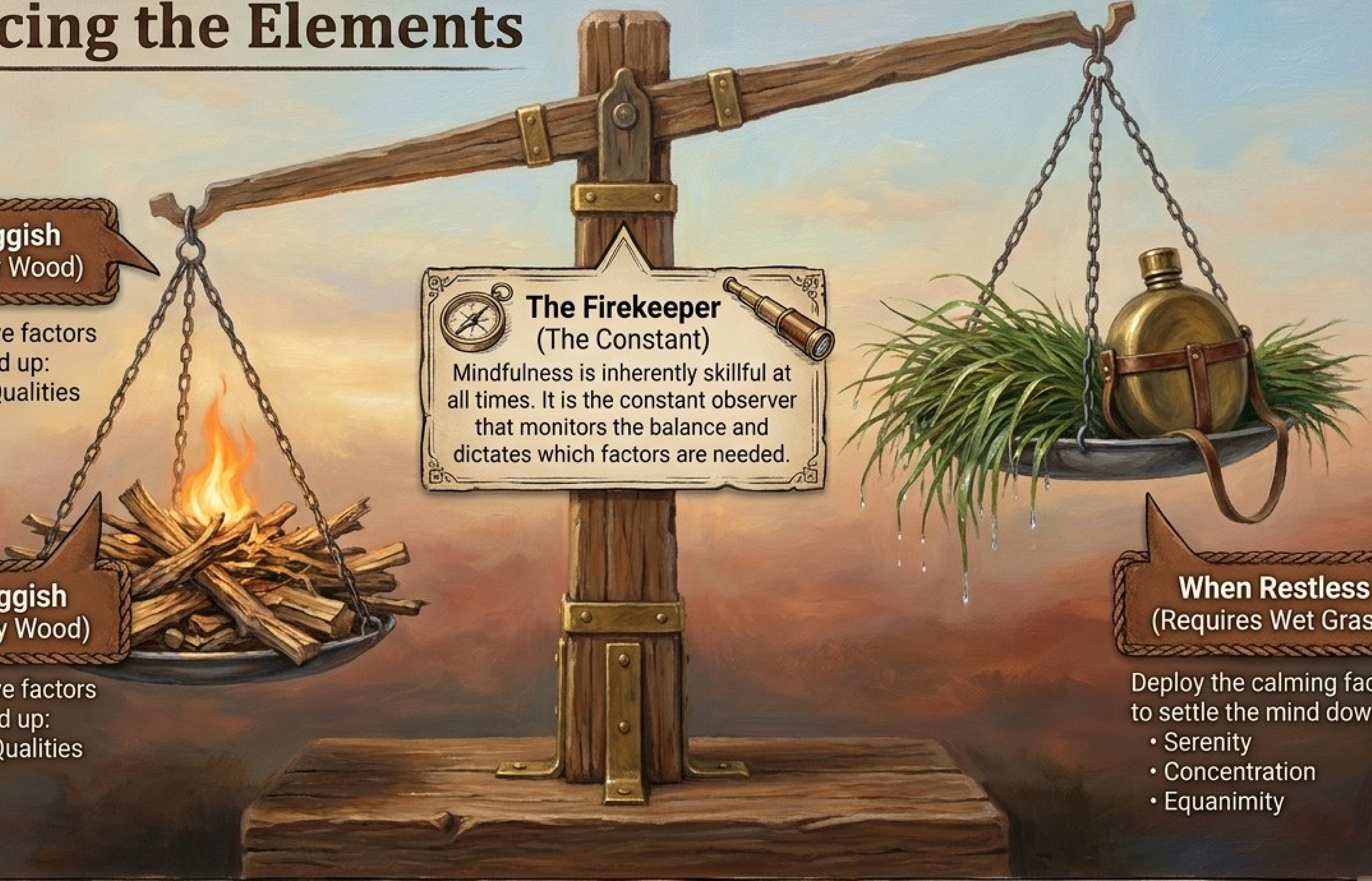
Just as if a man, wanting to make a small fire blaze up, were to place wet grass in it... Is it possible he would make it blaze? No.

The Restless Mind



Just as if a man, wanting to put out a large fire, were to place dry grass in it and blow on it... Is it possible he would put it out? No.

Balancing the Elements



When Sluggish
(Requires Dry Wood)

Deploy the active factors to raise the mind up:

- Analysis of Qualities
- Persistence
- Rapture

When Sluggish
(Requires Dry Wood)

Deploy the active factors to raise the mind up:

- Analysis of Qualities
- Persistence
- Rapture

The Firekeeper
(The Constant)

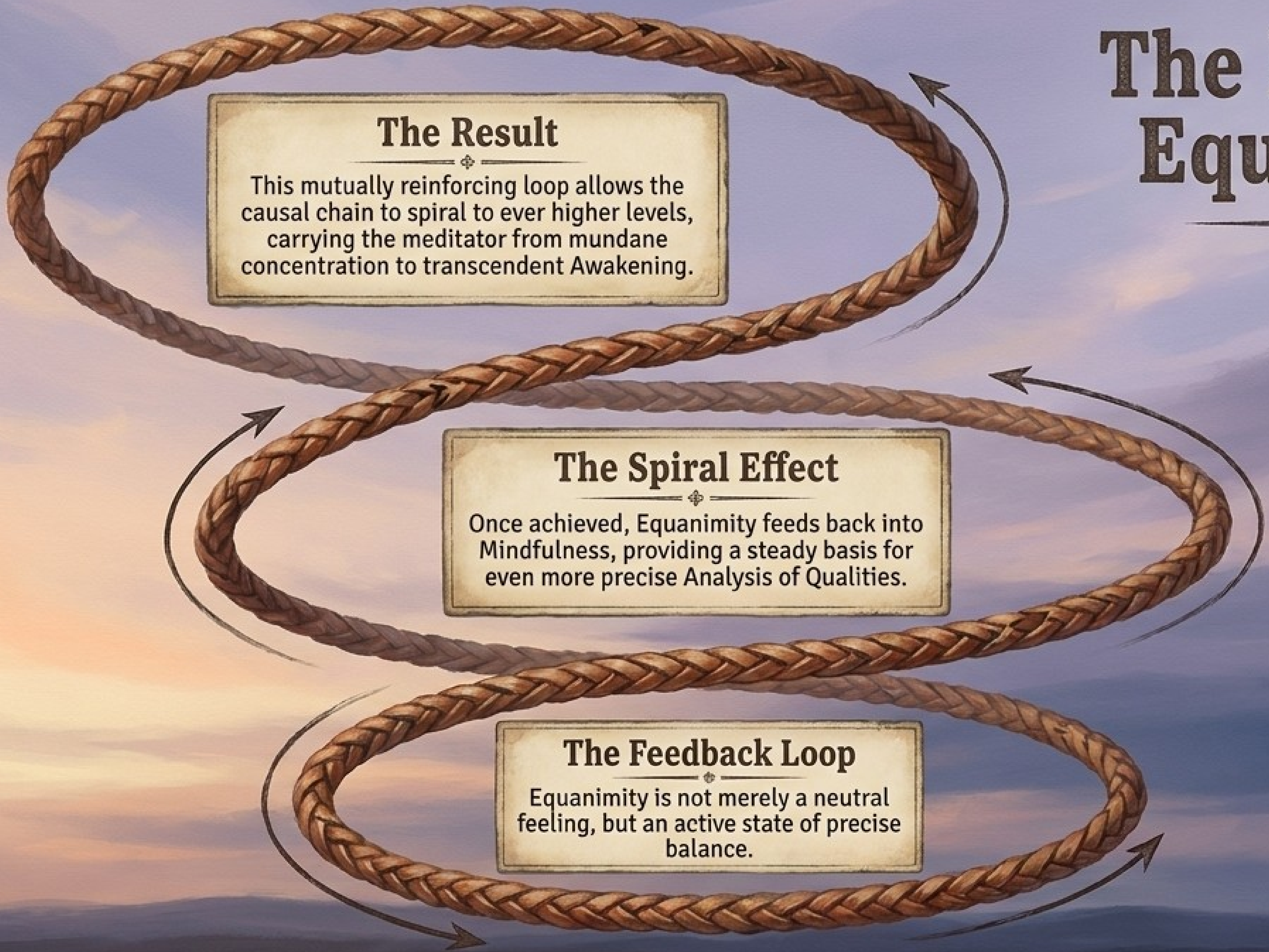
Mindfulness is inherently skillful at all times. It is the constant observer that monitors the balance and dictates which factors are needed.

When Restless
(Requires Wet Grass)

Deploy the calming factors to settle the mind down:

- Serenity
- Concentration
- Equanimity

The Lasso of Equanimity



The Result

This mutually reinforcing loop allows the causal chain to spiral to ever higher levels, carrying the meditator from mundane concentration to transcendent Awakening.

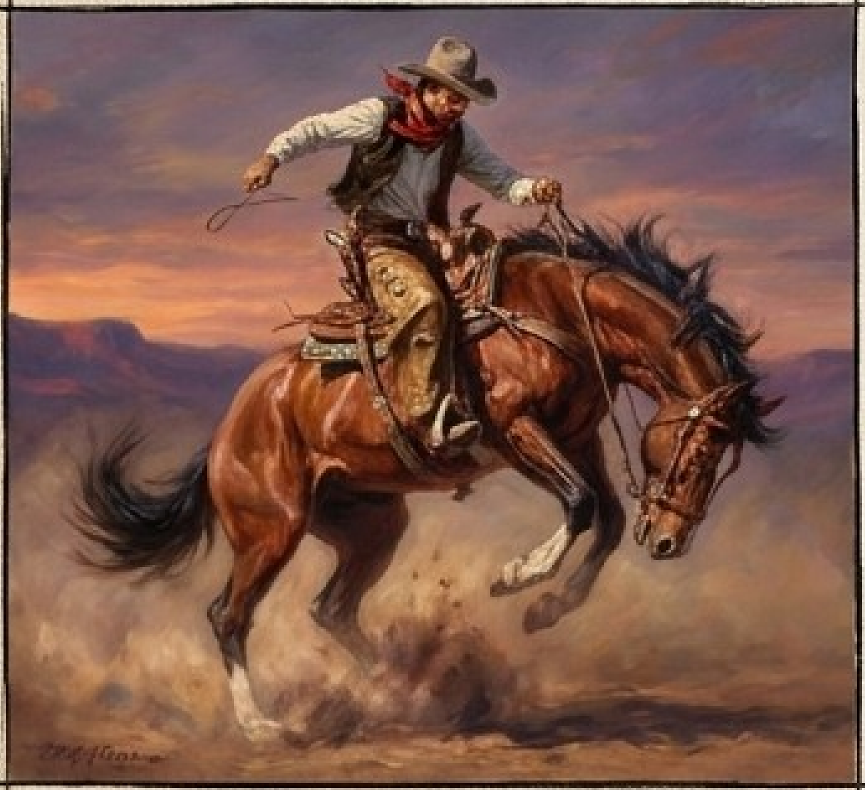
The Spiral Effect

Once achieved, Equanimity feeds back into Mindfulness, providing a steady basis for even more precise Analysis of Qualities.

The Feedback Loop

Equanimity is not merely a neutral feeling, but an active state of precise balance.

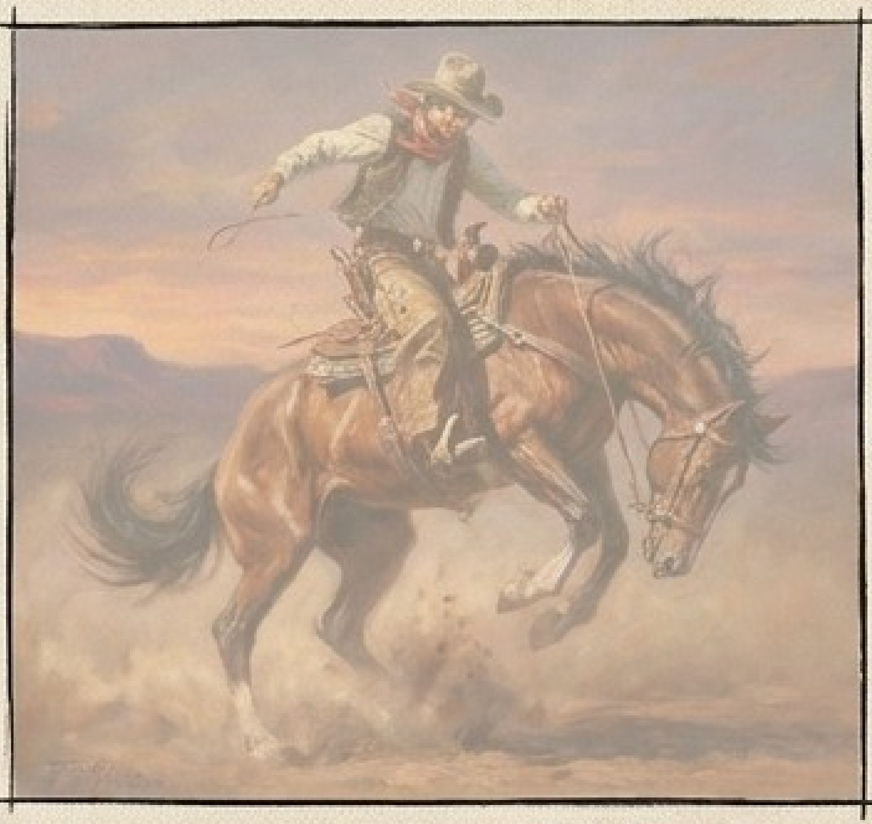
Shedding the Narrative Self



Stage 1: Narrative Mode

I am angry at him.

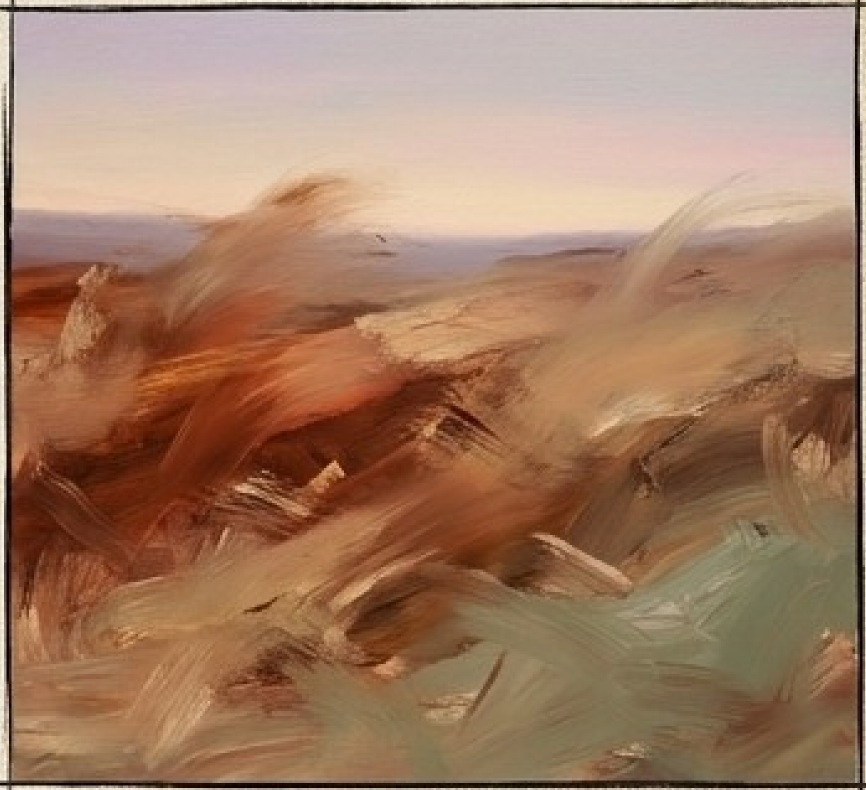
(Focuses outward, excites self-identity)



Stage 2: Internal Frame

I am experiencing ill-will.

(Utilizes me/my strictly to redirect focus inward)



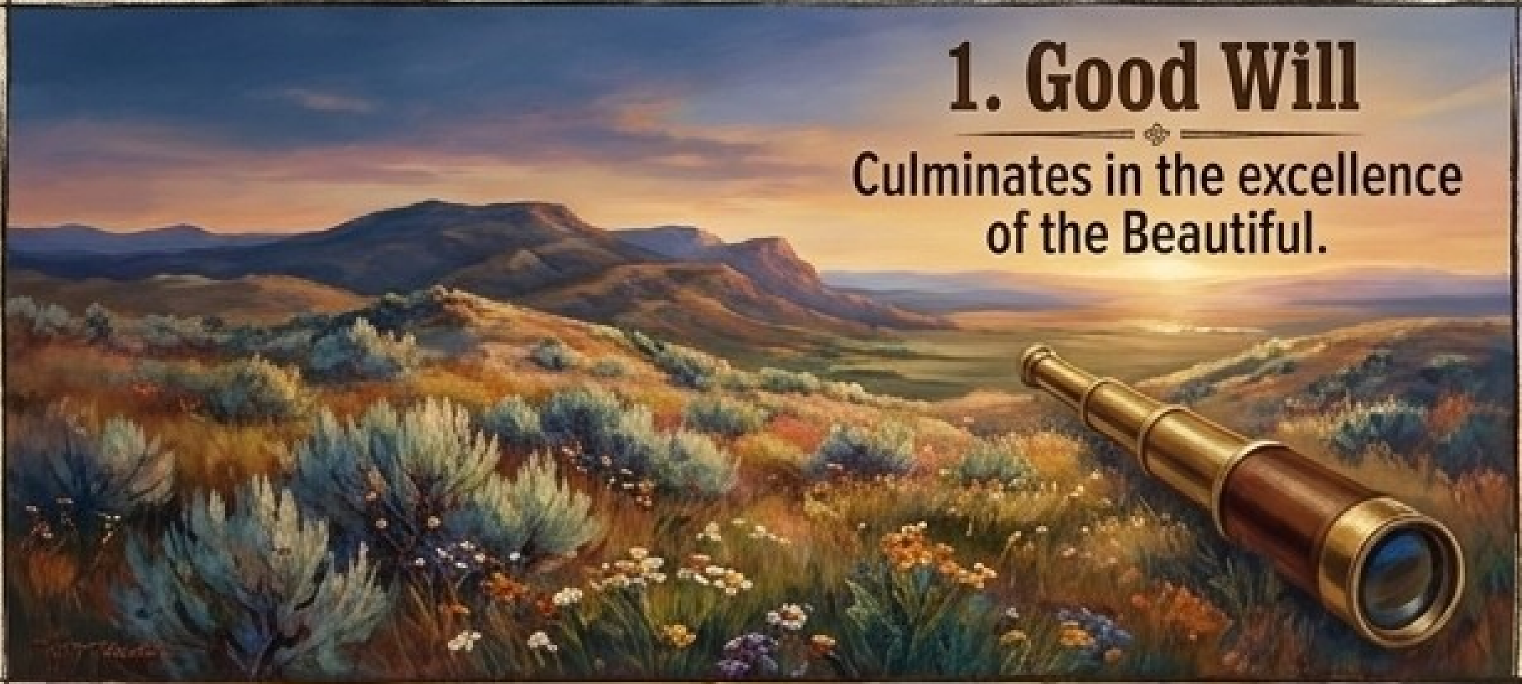
Stage 3: Entering Emptiness

There is this mental quality.

(Dispenses with me. Identifies the hindrance purely as a phenomenological event).

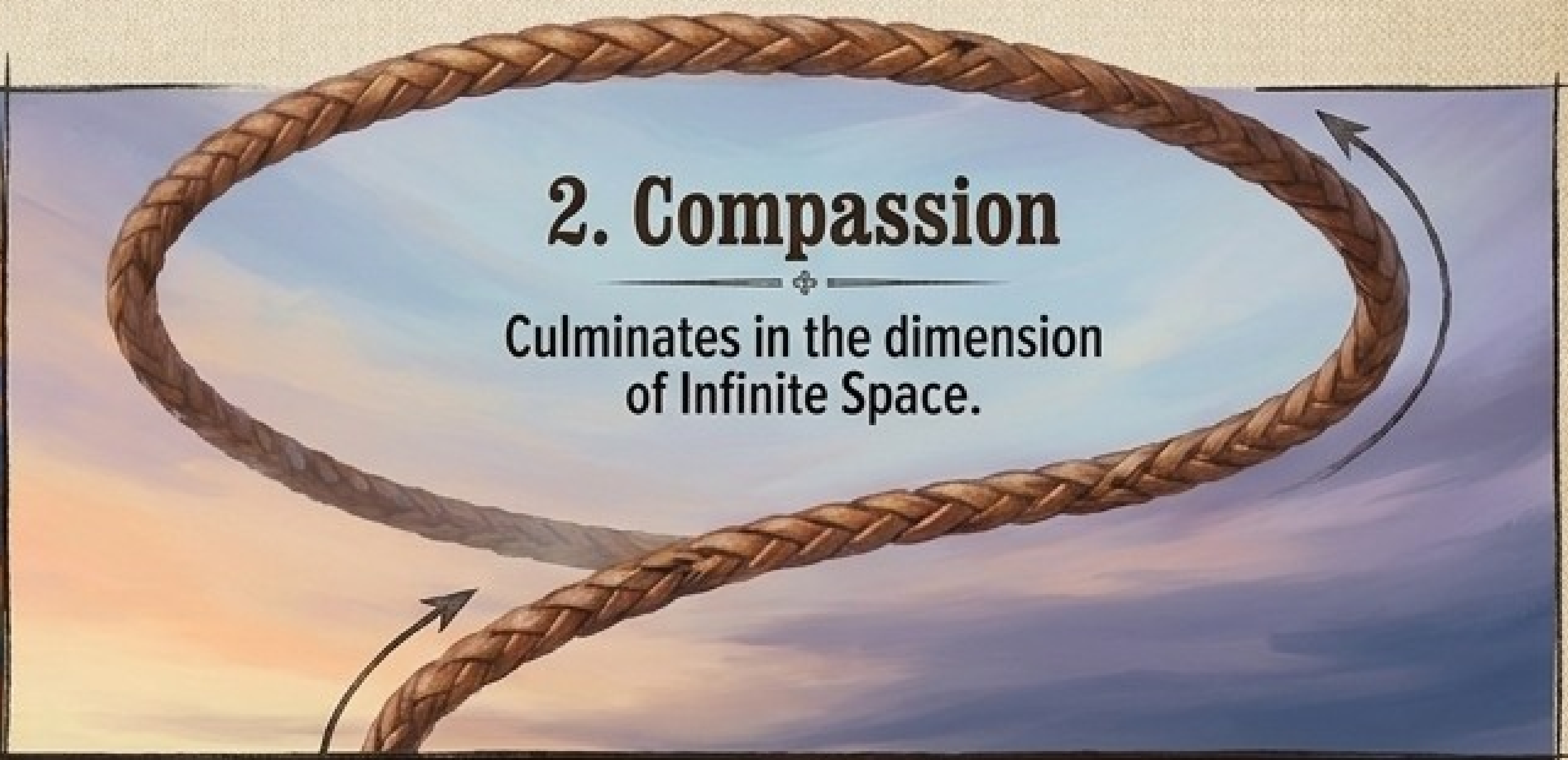
Four Horizons of Awareness-Release

As the factors develop, they can be directed into four attitudes, each culminating in a specific meditative dimension before full transcendence.



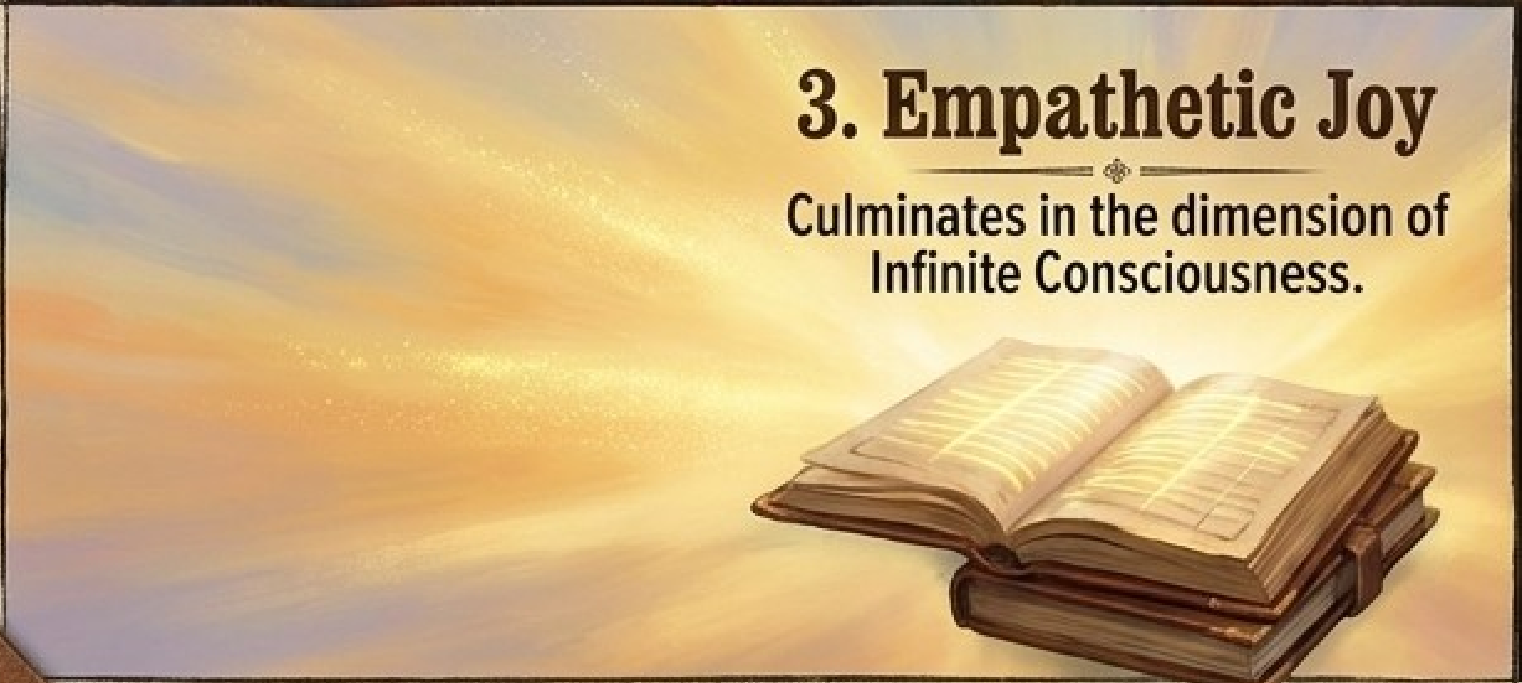
1. Good Will

Culminates in the excellence of the Beautiful.



2. Compassion

Culminates in the dimension of Infinite Space.



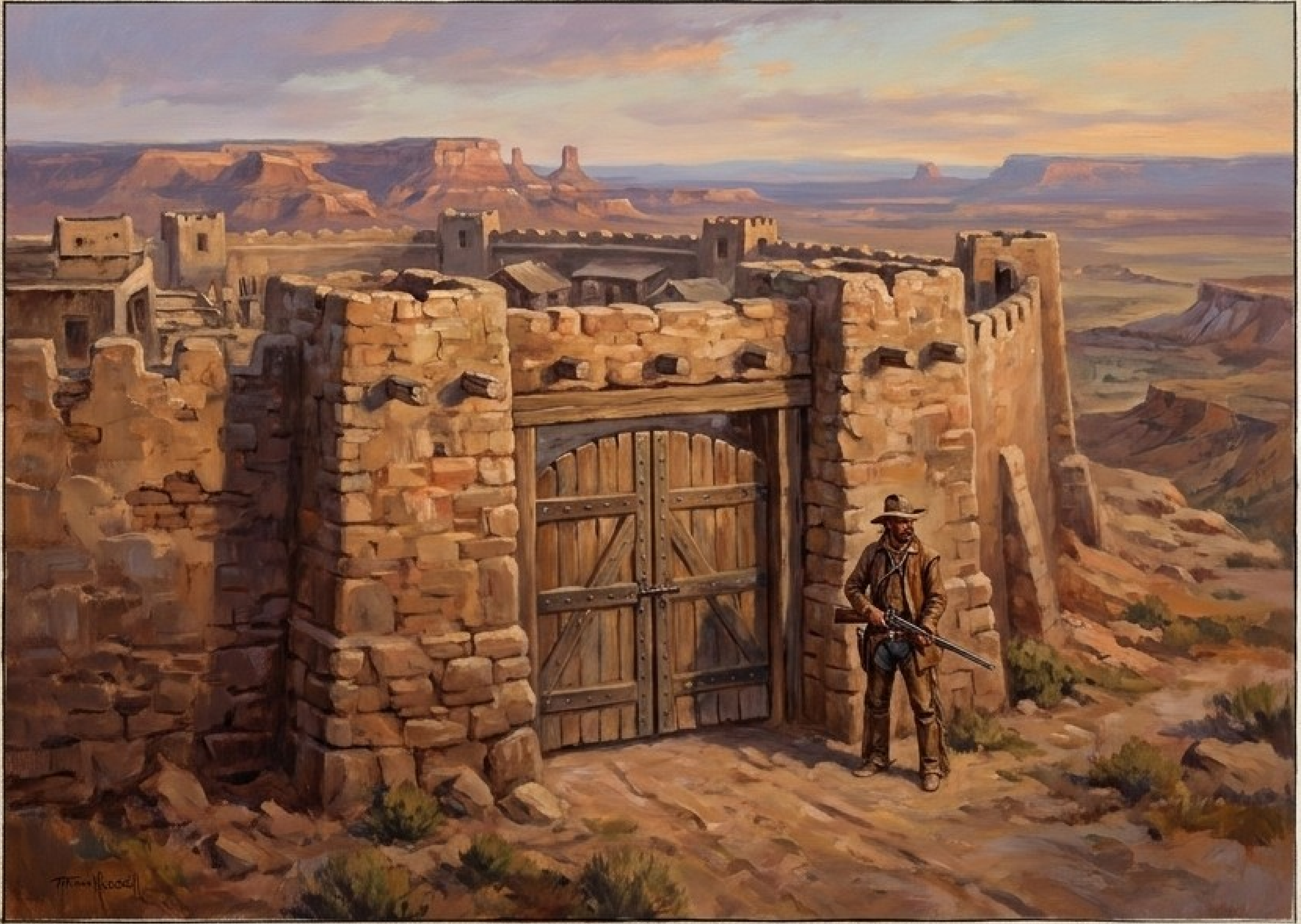
3. Empathetic Joy

Culminates in the dimension of Infinite Consciousness.

4. Equanimity

Culminates in the dimension of Nothingness.

The Frontier City Gatekeeper



The Metaphor (§99)

A wise gatekeeper doesn't need to know how vast the world is outside. He only needs to know that every single creature that enters or leaves the city must pass through this one gate.

The Truth of the Path

The Buddha knows this absolute law: All who ever reach awakening—past, present, or future—do so only by passing through this single gate: abandoning the Five Hindrances and developing the Seven Factors.

Seclusion, Dispassion, Cessation, and Letting Go

The Culmination: The spiraling loop of the Seven Factors continually feeds back on itself until the intention of practice gives way to transcendent freedom.

The End of the Trail: Dependent on seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, the factors result in letting go. Appropriate attention gives way to transcendent clear knowing. The mind reaches the state of non-fashioning—resplendent, effluents ended, Unbound.